

Brother - Chapter 13-31

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13

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, Kai, m@o, Marcia



Book Two of [Brother](#)!

Thirteen

Dear Prince, I must leave you, but I will never forget you, and next spring I will bring back two beautiful jewels in place of those you have given away. The ruby shall be redder than a red rose, and the sapphire shall be as blue as the great sea.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Happy Prince*

1989

“Good evening. This is the [News Simulcast](#) for Friday, May 19th 1989, the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month. In today’s programme, we look at the

important speech by Premier Zhao Ziyang at Tiananmen Square in Beijing reaching out to the student protesters to stop fasting; the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Mikhail Gorbachev, returns home after completing a state visit to China and has left Beijing on a private jet last night...*bzzz...bzzz...We will now go into more depth on...bzzzzzzz....*”

Xu Ping hit the 19-inch colour television with his wet hands as the signal kept disconnecting. He grabbed the two antennae behind the television and wiggled them around for a while, but the only thing on the screen was static.

“What happened to the TV?” he muttered to himself.

A series of popping sounds from the pressure cooker forced Xu Ping to stop the inspection and rush back to the kitchen.

Pork ribs and potatoes were being braised in the pressure cooker, and as the small ventilation knob spun around, a mouth-watering scent wafted out.

Xu Ping took a deep breath and removed the cooker from the gas stove.

The rice was already done. Xu Ping took out a bundle of baby bok choy from the green plastic vegetable basket and washed it a bit before stir frying it with some garlic. The drops of water still on the vegetable splashed into the boiling oil and exploded like firecrackers.

“*Xiao-Zheng*, dinner!” he shouted as he piled the baby bok choy onto a plate.

When he opened the pressure cooker, a wave of steam came rushing forth, clouding his glasses. He took a step back only to bump into a warm body. He almost tripped but the person grabbed ahold of him.

Xu Ping knew without having to look back that it was his brother who, although three years younger, had already grown taller. The boy’s frame was no longer adorable as it had once been. He was like a seedling that had grown into a small tree, while still immature, the future that lay ahead was clear to see.

Xu Zheng was definitely their father’s son.

Xu Ping wiped his glasses with a corner of his shirt. “Don’t stand behind me like that without telling me again, okay? I could’ve stepped on you.”

“I called you,” Xu Zheng spoke slowly. “You didn’t hear.”

Xu Ping replaced his black glasses back on his nose and wiped away the sweat on his forehead with an arm. “Let’s eat. We’re having ribs and potatoes tonight.”

The brothers sat down at the round dinner table, and Xu Ping picked some food into his brother’s bowl.

“...you are still young, dear students! The road ahead is long and you should live on healthily to see our country reach [modernization](#). You are not like us who are old. The state and your parents put in hard work to raise you to be university students. You are now nineteen, maybe twenty years old, and to be sacrificing your life like this...I did not come for a discussion today. I came to ask that you think about this rationally....”

An old man wearing a Mao suit was speaking into a red loudspeaker in a thick Henan accent.

Xu Ping listened carefully to the leader’s entire speech with chopsticks in midair. He turned to his brother. “Did you fix the TV?”

Xu Zheng was spooning a piece of potato towards his mouth when his brother interrupted him. The potato fell back into his bowl.

Xu Ping chuckled and gently patted his clumsy brother on the head.

Brrrrring!

Xu Ping put down his utensils and picked up the phone. “Hello?”

“Hi, Xu Ping? It’s Dad.” A familiar, deep voice said on the line.

Xu Ping covered the receiver and told his brother to lower the television volume.

“Dad, how’s shooting going?”

“Good, good. We’re still taking exterior shots in Yan’an. I had nothing to shoot today so I took the day off and came to the [post office](#) to give you a call. How’s everything at home?”

“We’re doing good. Just eating dinner now, actually. Braised potatoes and ribs. So when are you coming home, Dad?”

“In a few more days. The director wanted to reshoot a few more scenes after this. You know I’m old pals with Wang, and I told him my son’s taking the university entrance exam. He immediately agreed to let me shoot my parts first so I can head home right after we finish.”

“Don’t rush it, Dad,” Xu Ping replied with a smirk. “It might be a supporting role again, but this one’s our great Premier [Zhou Enlai](#). You’d better give it a hundred and ten percent and not let him down.”

“Let him down?!” Xu Chuan snorted. “I am a [Golden Rooster](#) winner, thank you very much! I was just too skinny to play the great President [Mao](#) back then, or else I would’ve definitely been the leading role!”

Xu Ping broke out in laughter.

The second year after his brother came back home, a director from [August First](#) got in contact with his dad and offered him a role as [He Long](#), the rebel who joined the revolution with two cleavers. Xu Chuan grew a moustache and learned [Tujia](#) with a colleague. He carried around two Mauser C96s that he carved out of wood and practised whipping them out at home. He entertained his son by making gunshot sounds while he did so and by telling jokes in the Hunan language. The movie received acclaim after its release, and Xu Chuan won the Golden Rooster that year for best supporting role. He finally had his big break as an actor at the age of thirty-eight and made it to the big screen.

“Do you have enough to spend?”

“Yeah. Xu Zheng and I don’t need to buy anything expensive, and groceries don’t cost that much.”

“How’s reviewing?”

“We’re doing exercises every day, and mock tests every three days. Getting into university shouldn’t be a problem if I perform normally.”

Xu Chuan hesitated before asking tentatively, “What schools were you planning to apply to?”

Xu Ping didn’t answer.

“I talked on the phone with your homeroom teacher the other day. She said

that your marks on the region-wide mock tests came out, and you need to fill out your application by the end of the month. She told me your marks are really good and the school wants you to apply for a school in Beijing and they asked me to give you support as a parent.” Xu Chuan paused. “Are you there, son?”

“Yeah.”

Xu Chuan continued after a moment. “For all these years, with your mom gone and your brother like this, this family wouldn’t have made it this far if you weren’t such a good kid. You’re stronger than me, you’re responsible and independent. You’ve never made me worry whether it comes to your brother or your own schoolwork. Dad’s never thanked you for all that.”

“Dad!” Xu Ping interrupted. “What are you saying? We’re family!”

Xu Chuan didn’t stop. “Son, you’re old enough for what I’m about to say. Dad’s not a capable man. I only know how to act. I can’t do business and become a millionaire, but I’ve been working in so many projects these years and saved a few bucks. Maybe not a lot but I can spare a couple grand. I just want you to know, you’re still young and you got a whole life ahead of you. I’m not that old either, and it’s not time for you to shoulder everything yet. Our family might be different, but I want you to have a good life like any other parent. I want you to know that you don’t have to worry when you fill out that application form ‘cause Dad will support you whatever you choose. The world’s a big place, and you should explore it while you’re young, broaden your horizons. *Xiao*-Zheng has his own life, just as you have your own, and you both are my sons.”

“Geez, Dad,” Xu Ping said with red, teary eyes. “Was that the script you were reading?! I got goose bumps hearing that. The telephone’s not cheap, Dad. I’d rather you buy more souvenirs to bring back.”

“My god, you lil’ rascal. Here I am trying to have a serious talk with you. That was no script!”

Xu Ping nodded with the receiver between his shoulder and ear. “Yeah, yeah, yeah, Mr. Premier Zhou.”

Xu Chuan lost the will to continue and only replied weakly, “Oh whatever, you lil’ rebel. But I do have to warn you, it hasn’t been very peaceful out there lately. Even we’ve caught wind of it out here in the boondocks. Just a bunch of crazy

children, I say. Don't you dare join whatever it is they're doing!"

"Why would I," Xu Ping retorted, "The entrance exam's next month!"

Xu Chuan felt relieved. "You youngsters haven't been through anything. You don't know the consequences of political movements."

"Dad," Xu Ping asked, "Do you want to talk to *Xiao-Zheng*?"

Xu Chuan paused before answering, "Yeah."

Xu Ping put down the receiver and beckoned his brother.

Xu Zheng was a fast eater. His bowl had long been empty, and he was watching the television while sitting upright like an elementary student with hands on his lap. His gaze had not changed and was very focused. Other than the lack of a tail, he looked just like a golden retriever.

"*Xiao-Zheng*, it's Dad."

Xu Zheng slowly strained his neck to look without moving the rest of his body.

"Come talk with Dad." Xu Ping gently rubbed his brother's head. "Ask how he's doing."

Xu Zheng stared at his brother as he walked over to the phone.

"HELLO!"



A typical pressure cooker



Braised ribs and potatoes

For more information:

[News Simulcast](#) (also, an [article](#) by The Economist)

The [speech](#) by Zhao Ziyang (note, the subtitles are not in sync but are accurate)

[Zhao Ziyang](#)

[Video](#) of spinning pressure cooker knob

[Yan'an](#)

[Zhou Enlai](#)

[Four Modernizations](#)

[Mao Zedong](#)

[He Long](#)

[Golden Rooster Awards](#)

[August First Film Studio](#)

[Tujia language](#)

Note: The author used a lay term when referring to the language/dialect that Xu Chuan learned, so I could not figure out which language it was. I took the liberty to guess on the basis that He Long was Tujia that the language was Tujia.

ayszhang: A slow start to Book Two...but next chapter... ;)

I'm flying home (Vancouver!) on Sunday! Will be staying for two and a half weeks. Brother updates should be consistent (unless there are surprises) while TDDUP will have to wait until April.

Both these stories are about to get very political...if you haven't caught the drift already x_x

[Twelve](#)

[Fourteen](#)



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Translator: ayszhang

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Chapter 14 of [Brother](#)!

Are they going to cross the boundary of brothers...?

NSFWish

Fourteen

And life is very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood, and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?

—Oscar Wilde, *The Nightingale and the Rose*

Xu Zheng was sitting at the dinner table, slowly turning the dial of the radio with his ear against the speakers.

Xu Chuan had bought the small black box for his younger son when he was shooting in Shanghai. Two AA batteries fit in the back and allowed the user to carry it along on their morning jog or a stroll in the park. It was the definition of modern in the eighties.

His brother listened closely to the static that sounded just like noise to Xu Ping. The younger boy looked like the underground communist agents as portrayed in movies, waiting to decode the enemy's telegram.

The red bucket lay in the back of the cupboard along with the ball and shovel, slowly gathering dust.

THE WHEELS OF TIME CANNOT BE STOPPED! COMMUNISM IS UPON US!

Xu Ping had read a slogan on one of the walls in their neighbourhood when he was younger, and it made a deep impression on him. He had once imagined the entire world as a pot of congee that was being stirred by a ladle called time while the old rice melted at the bottom of the pot with new rice being constantly added in.

The great leaders had gone to their last resting place before the communist dream came true, first Premier Zhou, then Chairman Mao. Though he was only five years old, Xu Ping could not forget the white flowers and the mourners who gathered in the thousands to weep.

Before he knew it, his brother had grown up too. He wasn't sure when the younger boy abandoned sand and began taking a passion with complex stuff like vacuum tube radios.

Xu Ping contemplated as he sped through the politics exercise given by his teacher – explain briefly the meaning of the statement “Our country is currently in the initial stage of communism” and provide evidence.

The window before the desk was open. The cool breeze of the May evening brought in the delightful smell of some flower while small bugs kept bumping into the green mesh as they tried to race to the light indoors.

The clock in the living room went tick-tock in a steady rhythm.

“...Secretariat of the Party, Wen Jiabao, was also among those who visited the students at Tiananmen Square. Today marks the seventh day of the fast at Tiananmen Square. Many students have showed signs of failing health and numerous had been hospitalized last night. This was the Voice of America.”

The voice of a female announcer from an enemy station suddenly started playing from the shortwave channel that Xu Zheng had found.

Startled, Xu Ping barked at his brother, “*Xiao-Zheng!*”

Xu Zheng slowly turned to look at his brother.

“Don’t listen to this,” Xu Ping explained hurriedly.

After the nine-thirty news, the station started playing Teresa Teng’s *Goodbye My Love*.

Goodbye my love, [my love goodbye](#). Goodbye my love, who knows when we’ll meet again.

It was a song so gentle and dear that even Xu Zheng became engrossed and ignored his brother.

Xu Ping got up to shut the window and draw the dark green curtains.

He switched off the desk lamp and walked towards his brother.

There was only a small, dim bedside lamp illuminating the room.

He sat down beside his brother and rested his head on a hand as they listened to this song that was [once banned](#).

I’ll always miss you, miss you with a gentle love, miss you with a burning heart, miss you with a sweet, sweet kiss. O that beautiful voice, how could I ever forget this love. My love goodbye, who knows where we’ll meet again...

Xu Ping tilted to look at his brother. His face was half hidden in the shadows, his deep-set eyes, thick brows and sharp jaw line. The younger boy turned to face his brother with a gentle and focused gaze. The dim orangey light behind him surrounded his silhouette in a halo of gold like that of an angel.

Xu Ping’s heart skipped several beats.

“Do you know what she’s singing about?”

Xu Zheng gazed at his brother without a word.

Xu Ping squinted before saying, “Well, you’ll...”

He didn’t finish. He wanted to say that you would understand the lyrics when you fall in love in the future, but then he realized his retard brother might not ever experience romantic love.

His own gaze filled with sorrow. His brother was a good-looking lad, even more so than their father in his youth. If he had a normal IQ, all the girls would go crazy for him.

Xu Ping flashed a forced smile at his brother.

“*Xiao-Zheng.*”

“Mhm?”

Would his brother fall in love with a girl?

Was it IQ or instincts that controlled whom one liked?

But he couldn’t ask. He didn’t want to think about his brother falling in love with someone and being heartbroken from not receiving anything in response. If it was going to be like that, he’d rather Xu Zheng stayed dumb and always be happy.

Xu Zheng looked at his brother who had called his name but had not spoken.

“Dummy!” Xu Ping rubbed his brother’s head roughly. “Don’t listen to stuff you don’t understand. Listening at home is okay, but you’ll get arrested for listening to it out in public. Got it?”

Xu Zheng shook his head.

“If you like Teresa Teng, I’ll buy you a few tapes. Don’t listen to the stuff on the radio again.”

Xu Zheng turned his attention back to the radio and spoke with a little lisp, “Good song. I like it.”

Xu Ping chuckled and put an arm around his brother.

How could Xu Zheng possibly understand the rules of the outside world when he lived in his own tiny one? The only ones who could protect him were Xu Ping

and their father and no one else. But in this moment, Xu Ping didn't want to disrupt the lovely song playing in his brother's peaceful world.

"Dummy," he replied quietly.

After several Theresa Teng's songs was the late night programme teaching English. The host was a man with a raspy voice. Xu Zheng didn't like his voice and changed the channel in a slightly dissatisfied manner.

Xu Ping stood up for a stretch. "Time to wash up and go to bed."

Xu Zheng carefully put the radio back into its case like the good boy he was.

It only took the newly installed boiler five minutes to get the water to a nice, hot temperature.

Standing outside the tub, Xu Ping instructed as he rolled up his sleeves, "Quick, take your clothes off. The water's almost ready."

Then he heard the soft rustling of fabrics from behind.

Xu Ping had his pant legs all rolled up when he turned to find his brother naked on top but struggling to unzip his pants.

"Here, let me," Xu Ping offered.

Thick, blue jean pants had become popular among the younger crowd recently and bell-bottoms became a style icon. With his height and long legs, Xu Zheng looked great in jeans.

Xu Ping tugged on the zipper, but it did not budge even a little.

After taking a closer look, he shouted almost immediately, "You asshole! How many times do I have to tell you? Always wear underwear before wearing jeans! Underwear, you understand?!"

Xu Zheng stared dumbly at his brother. "Oh."

Xu Ping wanted to drive his fist in the wall. "Oh? You say that every time! But you forget it as soon as you do! You're doing this on purpose, aren't you, Xu Zheng?!"

His brother made an innocent face like a puppy, "Too tight. Uncomfortable."

Xu Ping felt frustration beyond description. “And getting your hair stuck in the zipper is comfortable?! You’re just asking for it, aren’t you?!”

A silly smile appeared on his brother’s face.

“Ugh, alright. You wait here.” Defeated, Xu Ping went searching for the scissors.

He finally got the pants off after struggling with the hair and the pants. While he was battling with the zipper, he brushed his brother’s genitals several times, and soon it was erect. The penis was thick and long, the head a healthy pink. It made a small tent in the pants and peeked its head out from the top of the zipper.

Although his brain was that of a child’s, Xu Zheng’s body had matured. His testicles could produce sperm and was driven by hormones to reproduce like every other male on this earth.

Sweat dripped down Xu Ping’s forehead. His brother’s member was only inches away from his face, and he could smell the strong odor from Xu Zheng’s groin.

It hit Xu Ping that it wasn’t the pants that were too tight. It was his junk that was too big!

He glared at his brother only to meet the intent yet pure gaze of the younger boy, who was acting as though the swollen erection was not his.

“What are you looking at?” Xu Ping barked angrily.

Xu Zheng couldn’t sense that his brother was upset and replied seriously, “You’re good-looking.”

If he didn’t know his brother’s IQ, Xu Ping would have thought the younger boy was teasing him. His face flushed at the words, but he didn’t even know how to retort.

In the end, he commanded his brother to hold his hand in front of his own crotch. “Hold it!”

Xu Zheng held his own member while observing his furious brother struggling with the pant zipper.

Xu Ping had never been in such an awkward situation. He cursed silently as he

yanked downward.

The zipper flew off and the pants could finally come off.

Xu Ping pushed the pants down to the floor. "Feet up."

"The pants broke." Xu Zheng sounded a bit sad.

Xu Ping wiped his sweat off with the back of his hand. "No, it's not! I'll put it back for you later."

Xu Zheng was happy again.

Water began spraying out. Xu Ping grabbed the yellow showerhead and tested the temperature with a hand.

"Okay, get in."

A naked Xu Zheng stepped into the tub.

Xu Ping quickly sprayed his brother's torso. He looked up at his brother.

A bit angry, Xu Ping grumbled, "Put your head down."

Xu Zheng crouched down with his arms around his knees.

Xu Ping wet his brother's head before scooping a chunk of Seagull shampoo from its blue plastic container. He slapped it on his brother's hair and began scrubbing.

Xu Zheng's hair was short, but it was black, numerous and stiff, staying spiked even when wet.

Xu Ping clawed his brother's scalp.

His brother had really grown up. His shoulders had become wide and muscle tone was starting to show on his back. Two years ago, Xu Ping could have easily won in an arm wrestle, but this year on Chinese New Year's Eve, he had lost even after using all the strength he could muster.

Xu Ping glanced at his brother's strong arms and then at his own. He sighed.

He raised the showerhead and rinsed the lather out of his brother's hair.

"What did Dad say to you on the phone?" Xu Ping tried to make conversation.

Xu Zheng had his eyes tightly shut as the water splashed his head.

“Hi, *Xiao*-Zheng? It’s Dad. Did you have dinner? And what did you have? Did you like the ribs? Haha. Well, you have to thank your brother for that. I’ll be home in two or three days. You have to listen to your brother while Dad’s away, okay? Your brother’s busy these days, so don’t go bothering him. He needs to study for his exams. I’ll take you out to play when I come back. I’m in Yan’an right now, the place where our great President Mao stayed. I’ll bring back some local paper cut outs and you can stick them up on the windows. They’re really pretty. What pattern do you like, *Xiao*-Zheng? They got everything; cat, dog, donkey and even tree peony....”

Xu Ping listened to his brother repeat every word that their father had said like a tape recorder. He didn’t know how his brother did it. Aside from the lack of emotion, the sentences were almost exact replicas of the original.

How could anyone say he was stupid?

He patted his brother’s cheek lovingly. “Alright, the bubbles are gone now. You can open your eyes.”

Xu Zheng opened his eyes slowly and added unhappily, “Dad lied. I asked for one of *gege*. Dad said there are none.”

“Alright, don’t be mean to Dad.” Xu Ping chuckled. “I’ll cut one for you with some red paper and you can stick it up on the windows.”

“Okay.” Xu Zheng nodded delightfully.

All the feelings of frustration vanished at the sight of his brother’s adorably dumb expression. Xu Ping pulled his brother by the arm. “Stand up. Let’s clean the rest of you.”

His brother straightened up and held his fists on either side, keeping his body tense like an army drill.

Xu Ping clapped his shoulder, laughing. “Relax!”

The last bar of soap had been used up. Xu Ping took out a new bar of Bee & Flower sandalwood soap from Shanghai that was given to his father by the event organizer of a performance. He ripped open the paper packaging. The soap

inside was a brownish red colour and exuded a strong and rich fragrance.

Xu Ping sprayed his brother with water again before rubbing the soap bar on the younger boy.

From the neck to the collarbone, from the chest to the stomach.

The abdomen muscles began twitching.

Xu Ping shot a look. "What's wrong with you?"

Xu Zheng was standing with his body taut and his fists on either side. "It's ticklish, *Gege*."

"Tsk, what are you complaining about?" Xu Ping scolded. "Suck it up!"

He turned his brother around and began lathering the back.

Xu Zheng had the perfect body shape, an upside-down triangle made of broad shoulders, long arms and a slender waist. His butt was firm and round, and his thighs were strong and muscular.

As Xu Ping worked with the soap bar, he noticed that wherever he went, the muscles would start twitching. It was like throwing a pebble into water and watching the ripples spread.

"Are you really that ticklish?!" Xu Ping exclaimed.

He turned his brother around again to find his member standing up again.

With his hands full of lather, Xu Ping stared at the erection for a moment.

It seemed to have sensed his gaze and jerked joyfully, spitting out a few drops of clear liquid. One went as far as Xu Ping's pants.

Xu Ping was quiet.

Veins were bulging out on Xu Zheng's neck, and his face was red too.

"*Gege*," he called.

"Do you feel bad?" Xu Ping asked.

Xu Zheng took a second to think before nodding.

"Do you know what to do?"

His dumb brother shook his head.

Xu Ping leisurely wiped the foam from his hands while replying, “I’ll help you.”

He pointed the showerhead at his brother’s crotch and opened the cold water.

“AGH!” Xu Zheng shot up like a spring. His little guy had already shrunken back into its bush, and the balls looked smaller too.

Xu Ping pushed his brother’s head down and showered him with cold water, making Xu Zheng howl.

Xu Ping didn’t care and held onto his brother’s neck while he scolded, “You damn little rascal! Don’t you ever dare do that again!”



Seagull shampoo



Bee & Flower sandalwood soap

[Goodbye My Love](#)

[Live performance](#) of Goodbye My Love (note the glamorous appearance that the communist party thought promoted capitalism)

ayszhang: NSFW but not really xDDD I'm alive and suffering through jetlag
=.zzZZZ but it's been busy meeting with family and friends! Will be a bit slow
with replying comments and stuff <3

[Thirteen](#)

[Fifteen](#)



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Translator: ayszhang

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Chapter 15 of [Brother!](#)
NSFWish

Fifteen

He was asleep in a short time and he dreamed of Africa when he was a boy and the long golden beaches and the white beaches, so white they hurt your eyes, and the high capes and the great brown mountains. He lived along that coast now every night and in his dreams he heard the surf roar and saw the native boats come riding through it.

—Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

When Xu Ping came out of the bathroom drying his hair with a towel, his brother

was already lying on the bed with his back to him.

Their two single beds had been pushed together and stayed that way since the year Xu Zheng had run away from home.

It was a bit stuffy. Xu Ping unfastened the top two buttons on his pyjama shirt.

“*Xiao-Zheng?*” he called quietly.

Xu Zheng lay facing the wall.

Xu Ping sat down at the edge of the bed and placed a hand on his brother’s shoulder.

The boy’s muscle tensed and soon Xu Zheng shook the hand off.

Xu Ping chuckled. “Still mad?”

Xu Zheng wiggled his head into the pillow like an ostrich, leaving only a bare, muscular back for his older brother.

Xu Ping broke out in breathy laughter. He patted his brother’s back. The slightly cool touch of his skin prompted him to shake out the blankets and pull them over his brother.

He turned off the tableside lamp and opened the windows just a crack so his brother could have fresh air while asleep.

After he had done everything, he stayed in the dark room gazing at his brother, at the gently rising and falling of the blanket-covered body, at his black hair and at the strong shoulders the blanket couldn’t cover.

Xu Ping did not have a joyful expression on his face, though. He was frowning with his lips tightly pursed.

But this was hidden away by the silent darkness like all the other unknown secrets.

He sighed as he picked up his glasses from the desk and put them back on. Quietly, he grabbed his books and closed the door behind him as he left.

Outside of his periphery, Xu Zheng’s head had bobbed up and then back down after hearing the door closed. Then, after a moment, he kicked the blankets off and rolled around like a poor, ignored puppy before lying back down facing the

wall.

The lights in the living room were on even at one a.m. in the morning. The dining table was piled with mock tests and study materials. Other than the homework that the teacher had assigned, Xu Ping had a set of his own exercises to complete.

He had on dark blue cotton pyjamas as he worked away on the table.

The dining table was lower than the desk in his room, and the lighting wasn't that great either, so Xu Ping had to hunch lower. He didn't feel it at the time, but by the time he looked up after finishing the exercises, his back and neck were very sore.

He glanced at the clock on the wall. It was already one-thirty.

Xu Ping rubbed his neck as he stood up. He had bad circulation, and his hands and feet were already cold and stiff after sitting for long periods of time. He pushed the books away, deciding to tidy up in the morning, and pulled on the light switch.

Everybody was asleep at this time. None of the lights were on in the building next door. The only illumination was the moonlight pouring through the windows.

Xu Ping carefully manoeuvred his way back to the bedroom. He slowly slipped under the covers after taking his shoes off by the bed and placing his glasses on the bedside table.

He felt his body relax, and just when he wanted to breathe a sigh of relief, he was suddenly caught in a hot embrace.

Xu Ping's heartbeat quickened and then calmed down. He recognized the manly body odor, like that of a young lion roaming on the prairies, surrounding him.

He patted his brother's arm. "Why are you still awake?"

Xu Zheng only wrapped his arms tighter.

"Did I wake you up?" Xu Ping asked in a tired tone.

Xu Zheng had always been a light sleeper and would wake at the slightest noise.

Xu Ping was exhausted. The last year of high school was rigorous, and he still had to take care of his brother. All he wanted to do now was to sleep until the next day, but his brother's smell and warmth hovered around him, keeping him awake.

He pushed on Xu Zheng a little and said softly, "Alright. Go to sleep. It's late."

Not giving up, Xu Zheng lunged forward and almost knocked the breath out of Xu Ping.

"What's it with you?!" Xu Ping couldn't help but become impatient that he couldn't get his sleep.

Xu Zheng put his hands on either side of Xu Ping's head as he gazed intently at his brother, whose eyes glistened like stars even in the dark.

Xu Ping was afraid of looking in these eyes. He wasn't sure what he was afraid of. Perhaps the atmosphere today had been too suggestive. He looked away and repeated in a hoarse voice. "Alright. I'm really tired, and there's lots to do tomorrow...."

He didn't continue.

His brother grabbed Xu Ping's hand and placed it against his chest. "*Gege*, your hands are cold. I warm them for you."

Xu Ping stiffened and moments later, his nose began stinging. It took all his effort to keep his tears from falling.

Underneath his palm and the muscles of a young man, a heart was beating – boom boom boom. All the blood in his body came through here.

Xu Zheng put both of his brother's hands on his chest and whispered, "I waited for you for so long, *Gege*."

In the dark, Xu Ping's eyes reddened. "Are you cold?"

Xu Zheng answered as he had years ago. "Yeah." Then he pressed Xu Ping's hands even harder against his own chest.

“Lie down beside me,” Xu Ping told his brother.

Xu Zheng lay down on the same pillow while holding his brother’s hands. The two lay face to face, close enough for each to feel the other boy’s breath against his own face.

Xu Ping looked right into his brother’s eyes.

“*Xiao-Zheng.*”

“Yeah?”

“I’ll always be with you.”

Xu Zheng’s eyes widened, and then very, very slowly, a smile formed on his face.

“*Gege.*”

“Yeah?”

“Do you not like me anymore?”

“What are you saying?” Xu Ping rubbed his brother’s head. “Go to sleep.”

He turned to the other side, and his brother hugged him around the waist from behind.

“*Gege.*”

“Yeah?” Xu Ping said with his eyes closed.

“I feel weird lately.”

Xu Ping burst out laughing. “You’re not weird. You’ve just grown up.”

“Grown up...what’s grown up?”

Xu Ping held his brother’s hands. They were very big with especially thick joints.

“Men get erections when they get to your age. It’s normal. Nothing to be scared of.”

He grabbed his brother’s hand and led it down to his own crotch where his penis lay limp inside his underwear.

His brother's palm was hot, its temperature passing through his clothes to his member.

"It's usually limp here, but if it gets stimulated, like this...."

He used his brother's hand to gently stroke his own member. Soon the tissues filled with blood and began to harden.

He stopped his hand. "See, I'm the same, too. Every man gets hard, and if you can't get hard, then you're not a man."

Xu Zheng's breathing was heavy, sending warm and wet air against Xu Ping's neck.

He lay staring at the darkness in front of him without a sound.

"*Gege*," Xu Zheng called quietly by his ear.

Xu Ping did not answer.

Xu Zheng's arms tightened around him, and Xu Zheng began grinding his own erection against his brother.

"I don't feel good, *Gege*." Xu Zheng's voice was quiet and deep, the hoarseness of which was sexy beyond description.

Xu Ping reached around with a hand to find Xu Zheng all sweaty.

"*Xiao-Zheng*."

"*Gege*."

"Do you like cute girls?"

"Hm?"

"They have long hair, and they smell nice, and they're so soft hugging them feels like hugging a puff of cotton. They have nice, pale arms; big, round eyes; and a skinny waist. And their voice sounds like a songbird's."

With his head on his brother's shoulder, Xu Zheng thought for a long time.

"Liar. Girls are scary."

Xu Ping chuckled.

"You're still too young. Girls will be really nice to you in a few years when

you're seventeen, eighteen, when you're even taller and even more handsome."

Xu Zheng mulled it over but didn't understand. "Oh."

He pulled his brother into his arms even closer.

"Do you like them, *Gege*?"

Xu Ping didn't answer for some time. "Yeah, I do."

With his arms around his brother, Xu Zheng added, "Then I like them, too."

Xu Ping paused and patted his brother's face. "Alright, let's go to sleep. All your worries go away in your sleep."

The younger boy had not given up quite yet, and Xu Ping spoke with his eyes closed, "Bear with it. I'm doing it, too. If you can't stand it, then we can always go for the cold water instead."

Hearing this made Xu Zheng think of the experience earlier with the cold water, and a shiver ran through him. Scared to tempt his brother, he covered his crotch with both hands and left the other boy alone.

A smile appeared on Xu Ping's face as he finally drifted to sleep.

ayszhang: Ooooooh teeny bit of action between the brothers ;D

Happy Easter to those who celebrate it! :)

[Fourteen](#)

[Sixteen](#)



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Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, Kai, m@o, Marcia



Chapter 16 of [Brother!](#)

NSFW

Sixteen

He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy. He never dreamed about the boy.

—Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

Xu Ping knew very well he was dreaming.

He saw the broken glass under his feet, the withered China roses in the planter box, and the blood red sunset.

He walked up the concrete staircase and gently pushed open a worn wooden door covered in green paint.

He saw his twelve-year-old self being held up by two other children as Lu Jia smashed a brick into his head.

“Better that he dies! Retard is in the genes! So when Xu Ping gets married, his son’s gonna be just like his brother, all retards!”

“Liar! You liar!” He heard his young self screaming with anger.

“Me?! Your mom’s an idiot, and she gave birth to another idiot! So what if they look good?! Hah! Their brains are made of mush!”

He lunged forward to throw a punch at Lu Jia, but the scene suddenly changed. The abandoned room turned into a tidy living room.

“What did you just say, Zhang Jinmin?! You say that again! Don’t think I don’t know about your dirty little secrets! I know what you’re hiding in that book of yours! Take it out, I dare you! You disgusting—”

Slap!

Then, he heard the sharp shriek of a woman. “Did you just hit me?! Don’t do disgusting things if you don’t want people talking about it! The others may not know who you keep hidden in your heart, but I do! Go tell the Party you want a divorce! Go! I dare you! Tell them who you wrote that screenplay for! Tell them how Xu Chuan’s role came to be! Hah, you thought nobody’d find out? You may look prim and proper, but are you really?! You disgusting pervert!”

The door slammed open with a bang. The two adults came out locked in battle as they exchanged insults. He Mei’s hair was flying wild. Mr. Zhang’s face was in a scowl.

“Shut up! Shut up! I’ll kill you!”

Without much thought, Xu Ping took a step back.

Someone grabbed him from behind. Xu Ping turned his head to find his

brother.

“I don’t feel good, *Gege*,” his brother said with a flushed face and a frown.

“What’s wrong, *Xiao-Zheng*? Talk to me!” Worried, Xu Ping smacked his brother’s face lightly.

In response, his brother began sucking on his neck as he caressed his chest and crotch.

“*Gege*, I like you. I want to do it with you. Give it to me, *Gege*.”

He pushed Xu Ping down and began tearing at his clothes while rubbing his older brother’s groin.

“Stop, *Xiao-Zheng*! We’re brothers. We shouldn’t....”

Xu Zheng tore off his brother’s underwear and took the older boy’s erection into his own mouth.

“Ahh!” Xu Ping let out a long moan in his dream. He had never felt so good before.

“No, *Xiao-Zheng*, stop this....” He tried pushing at his brother’s head as it hovered above his crotch only to find his arms weak and limp.

He watched as his brother spread his legs and swallowed him deep. The younger boy’s sweat dripped onto his stomach. He watched the beautiful back of his brother rise and fall.

He asked himself if he was dreaming.

He thought as he grabbed onto his brother’s short hair. *This is ridiculous. This is ridiculous.*

But he couldn’t bear to stop now.

He opened his own legs and propped his arms behind himself as he arched his neck back.

Fuck it...

He let his voice go free, even telling his brother to take him in deeper and suck him harder.

With his dick in his mouth, Xu Zheng took a glance at his brother before dropping down again.

The pleasure streamed up his spine like waves of electricity. He reached orgasm amid the death-like euphoria that threatened to suck dry even his bone marrow.

He watched as his brother wiped off the sticky whiteness from his lips before kissing him. The white t-shirt was wet with sweat and clung onto the beautiful, muscular body.

He French kissed with his brother, their saliva dripping down from their lips.

He heard his brother's voice as his brother cupped his hands around his face: "You're not my *gege*, and I'm not your *didi*...."

Ding-a-ling-ling!

Xu Ping sat up in bed, panting.

The Big Ben alarm clock was still ringing on his nightstand, and he smacked the top to silence it.

It was six o'clock exactly. The sky was still dim as the first rays burst forth in the night sky. The faint white sliver that was the moon was still visible against the pale blue back drop. He could hear the brushing sound coming from the street cleaners on the roads.

Xu Ping lay panting with his arms around the blankets. He touched his face to find his forehead covered with cold sweat.

His brother was still fast asleep on top of the blankets with a leg straddled on Xu Ping.

Xu Ping pushed the leg and the blankets off.

His crotch felt damp and cold. The sticky mess on his inner thighs felt like disgusting, squirming bugs, sending shudders down his spine.

He was sitting on the bed with his arms around his head when he suddenly jumped to his feet and shot towards the bathroom.

The door slammed closed so hard that the metal latch broke and tumbled down with a clunk.

Spitting profanities, Xu Ping began ripping his clothes off.

His pajama shirt and pants fell to the floor along with his underwear. He stepped into the tub and turned on the cold water without even drawing the shower curtain.

Icy water hit his skin before dancing to the bottom of the tub.

Xu Ping shivered as goose bumps began to form all over.

With his hands on the white porcelain tiles, he let his hair get wet.

His mind was a train wreck, loud and obnoxious, but nothing could really get to him.

He wanted to drown into somewhere deep, somewhere without sound and worry, where he didn't have to ask himself why, or worry about tomorrow.

He turned the water higher as he closed his eyes.

The water quickly took away his bodily warmth. The burning sweat, the sticky fluid, all the dirty evidence was washed away.

The colder the water, the surer he was that he had become clean once more.

"Gege."

Xu Ping looked up, startled.

Xu Zheng was standing at the door wearing only underpants.

"What do you want?!" Xu Ping barked rudely.

Xu Zheng stared at Xu Ping.

Xu Ping drew the curtains sharply. "Can't you see I'm taking a shower?! Get out!"

Xu Zheng stood there for a moment before quietly leaving.

A turbulence rippled through the peace that Xu Ping had achieved. The cold shower had gone to waste.

He grabbed a towel to cover his lower half and brought the dirty clothing out

with him.

Xu Zheng was sitting at the dining table with his head down. He immediately stood up when he saw his brother.

Xu Ping walked past him without sparing a glance.

"I need the bathroom," Xu Zheng said to Xu Ping's back.

Xu Ping stopped, barely turning his head around. "Why are you telling me that?! You still need me to help you go peepee?! Just go do it yourself!"

The atmosphere in the house was strange all morning.

Xu Ping was helping his brother with the shirt buttons when he put too much force into his hands and one button flew off, tinkling as it skittered across the floor and under the wardrobe.

"Fuck!" Xu Ping swore furiously as he yanked the shirt off from his brother.

Xu Zheng looked at his brother steadily for a moment before asking quietly, "What does fuck mean?"

Xu Ping glared up at his brother, unable to speak for some time. He would have planted one right on the smacker if it were a person with even the average amount of intelligence.

He tried to hold it in as he took out another grey shirt from the shelves. "Lift your arms."

Xu Zheng followed the command. He gazed down at his brother buttoning up his shirt for him and breathed in the nice smell belonging to his brother.

He never really knew how to read between the lines.

"Gege, what does fuck mean?"

Xu Ping glanced at Xu Zheng only to scoff out of anger. He thought about it for a second with his head tilted and lips pursed. "I'll show you later."

He took his brother out at six-thirty sharp. As long as the weather allowed, the brothers would go around the field of the nearby elementary school every weekend.

Xu Ping unlocked his bicycle, and just as his brother tried to hop on the back seat, he stopped him.

“Not today.”

Xu Zheng stared back with big, dumb eyes.

“I ride the bike. You run. The elementary school field.”

As he explained, he jumped on the vehicle and shot forward several metres before turning his head around, rushing the other boy impatiently. “Are you coming or not?! Hurry!”

Then, he sped off.

It took Xu Zheng a second to register the situation, but he quickly ran after his brother.

There weren't many pedestrians on the streets on a Saturday morning. The warm sunlight rained down on Xu Ping. The shops along the street had not opened for the day yet. Only the farmers who had come into town at the crack of dawn were hollering at passersby with their vegetables in baskets beside them.

Xu Ping spotted a middle-age lady walking her dog on the other side of the street. The golden retriever was sniffing around the base of the trees while its tail wagged back and forth.

Xu Ping took one glance back at his brother. His lips jerked a bit, and he pedalled faster.

The old man working at reception wasn't there, so Xu Ping rode right into the field.

The broom flowers were in full bloom; the stems were crawling with shiny golden buds. The jasmines had budded too, and soon their delightful fragrance will fill the entire schoolyard.

Xu Ping stopped by the 400 metre track. The sun had just risen.

He could hear his brother's footsteps as he leisurely pushed the bicycle to the bleachers.

“Don’t stop. You usually run five laps, but today you have to do ten. I’ll sit here and count for you while I memorize some vocabulary.”

Xu Ping jumped onto the bleachers and took out his notebook after sitting down.

Xu Zheng stood panting.

“What, you got a problem?” Xu Ping looked up.

Xu Zheng shook his head and began running towards to the track paved with black gravel.

With his notebook in hand, Xu Ping started memorizing his list of vocabulary albeit half-heartedly.

“Athletic: related to sports; related to athletes; strong, muscular.”

The morning air was still a bit chilly. He sneezed and rubbed his red nose.

The sun rose from the east of the field. The green grass had been divided into boxes by white chalk lines, and goal posts stood on the two ends. A flag pole wide enough to hold with two hands was in the middle of the bleachers, and the national flag was billowing in the wind.

Xu Ping watched his brother run. The boy’s legs were long, and his muscles were evenly developed, both flexible and high in stamina. He ran like a healthy lion, and the sight was breathtaking even from afar.

Xu Zheng seemed to have noticed his brother looking at him and waved his arms wildly on the other side of the track.

Xu Ping ducked his head down as though he did not see that.

“Tight: to be (tied or stuck) close; hard to disentangle; dense.”

Xu Zheng finally came back to the bleachers, gasping for air, after Xu Ping had gone over the list twice. The shirt he was wearing was dripping with sweat.

“Done?”

Resting his hands on his knees, Xu Zheng nodded exhaustedly.

Xu Ping looked his brother up and down while tapping the notebook on his own thigh.

“Okay! Now give me forty push-ups!”

Xu Zheng looked up with an upset expression.

“*Ge....*” he groaned.

“I’m waiting.”

Xu Zheng bowed his head, and the sweat trickled down to the cement. He breathed out, bent down and put his hands on the ground.

“The posture’s wrong. Do it again.”

“Use your arms, not your hips. Do it again.”

“Why is your butt sticking out? I never taught you to do that! Do it again.”

The sweat was forming a small puddle underneath Xu Zheng. His short hair was wet like he had just come out of the shower.

Xu Ping criticized his posture relentlessly, making him redo the set because of the smallest mistakes.

When forty finally came along, Xu Zheng collapsed on the ground.

“Get up!”

Xu Zheng glanced at his brother and shook his head weakly.

“I’m so tired, *Gege*.”

Xu Ping crouched down by his brother.

“Do you want to know what fuck means?”

Xu Zheng nodded.

Xu Ping grabbed the other boy by the collar and straddled him. He stared right at Xu Zheng’s eyes and punched him in the face.

“Hit me back,” Xu Ping commanded flatly.

Xu Zheng shook his head.

Xu Ping threw another punch. This time Xu Zheng’s face flew sideways.

“Hit me back!”

Xu Zheng held his own face. “I won’t hit you, *Gege*.”

Xu Ping looked up at the sky for a second before showering his brother with more punches.

Xu Zheng's arms were not enough to shield him. Xu Ping pushed his arms away and kept beating him. "Hit me back! Why won't you hit me back?! Is it 'cause it's me?! You useless wuss. How many times do I have to tell you. Don't take a beating for nothing. Why can't you do that?! Take a punch! Hit me back! I didn't make you run and train to be a wimp! Hit me back! It's called self-protection, okay?! All animals know how. Are you so stupid you've forgotten?!"

Xu Zheng dodged left and right trying to escape. "I won't! I am stupid! They say I'm a retard! I know it. I'm an idiot."

Xu Ping froze. He grabbed his brother's collar. "Who's they? Who called you an idiot?!"

Xu Zheng turned his face away and didn't speak.

Xu Ping dropped the younger boy back on the ground after waiting for some time.

"You're not my brother. I don't have a weakling for a brother."

Before he even finished, Xu Zheng's fist made him fall to the ground.

Xu Ping looked at his brother as he touched his bleeding lips.

Xu Zheng sat up using the steps nearby.

"Very good." Xu Ping flashed a smile.

Xu Zheng watched him dumbly.

Xu Ping pushed himself up on the railing and spat out the blood in his mouth.

"*Xiao*-Zheng, I'll tell you what fuck means. Fuck is a word we will never use with one another. If someone forces you to do something you don't want to do, or if a man sits on you like I just did, you have to beat him until he begs for mercy no matter who that person is or how tired you are."

"Also," Xu Ping continued slowly, "Don't let anyone call you stupid. Don't let anyone tell you that you are different. We're all dumb. We all have things that others don't have. Xu Zheng is Xu Zheng, and you are a human being like

everyone else. You're all not much different from the rest of us."

ayszhang: SO BUSY I'll write in a comment here later!

EDIT: Hey guys :) The first week back to school is always a bit hectic. I didn't get time to send this to the proofreaders before I posted it, but our lovely proofreaders have replied with their corrections. So hopefully when later readers read this, it will be free of errors :)

[Fifteen](#)

[Seventeen](#)



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17

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, Kai, Lee, Marcia



Chapter 17 of [Brother!](#)

barely NSFW-ish

Important announcement at the end!

Seventeen

Power said to the world, "You are mine."

The world kept it prisoner on her throne.

Love said to the world, "I am thine."

The world gave it the freedom of her house.

—Rabindranath Tagore, *Stray Birds*

Vrooom!

A blue and white tram revved its engine and drove past nearly a dozen bicycles waiting at the red light, whisking up quite a bit of dust in its wake.

A middle aged man waiting for the tram on the other side walked over. “Hello, young comrade. How do I get to the Municipal Party School from here?”

Xu Ping searched for the answer in his mind. “Take the No. 15 bus westbound for three stops.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

The light turned from green to yellow, then from yellow to red.

Xu Ping pushed the ground with one leg and rode through the intersection on his bicycle along with the crowd.

His brother was holding onto his waist tightly. The boy’s legs were too long, and he had to sit in a ridiculous, curled position.

His legs got sore after a while, and he had just put his legs down when his brother spoke.

“Lift your legs. Don’t rub your shoes on the ground.”

“Okay,” Xu Zheng replied like a good boy.

The younger boy was growing very fast this year, and Xu Ping was starting to have difficulty bringing him along on the bicycle. He flexed his fingers and proceeded to put all his strength into pedaling.

“How does baozi sound for breakfast?”

Xu Zheng considered as he played with a corner of his brother’s shirt. “Good.”

The breakfast vendors had begun business for the day. Soy milk, fried doughnut, tofu dessert and red date cake, the delicious smells hit them in the face as they rode by.

Xu Ping stopped to the side and walked to the shop with a mountainous stack of bamboo steamers that had become dark with use.

“Could I get a dozen pork and bok choy?” he said to the owner.

The Xus were long-time customers of this baozi shop, and the owner was a die-hard fan of Xu Chuan. Two things hung on the wall that was less than ten square metres, a portrait of President Mao and a signed poster of one of Xu Chuan’s movies.

The slightly chubby owner heard and came out from behind the curtain.

“Oh, it’s you, Xu Ping,” she exclaimed merrily.

“Good morning, ma’am,” Xu Ping greeted with a smile.

“Your dad ask you to buy breakfast?”

“My dad’s still filming out of town. It’s just me and my brother. We were craving your baozi this morning.”

A pitiful expression appeared on the woman’s face. “My, my. How could he just leave two kids at home? One of them’s about to take the university exam, too!” Then, she turned to her short and skinny husband. “Hey, where’s *Xiao-Xu*’s baozi? Give the poor kids a few more.”

Xu Ping waved his hand. “No, no. That’s fine.”

“No, it ain’t fine!” The woman replied passionately before yelling at her husband again. “Why’re you gettin’ the ones on top? It’s all cold! Get the fresh ones on the bottom!”

In the end, there were sixteen baozi in the paper bag. The woman wanted to put in two extra fried doughnuts, but Xu Ping quickly refused.

Xu Ping was touched by her generosity and reminded Xu Zheng to say thanks, too.

The woman looked the younger boy up and down. “Wow, you’ve grown quite a lot, haven’t you! Look at this, even bigger than your brother. You’re looking more and more like your dad. Gonna be one handsome fellow in a few years!”

Xu Zheng kept his head down and stayed quiet.

“He doesn’t like talking to people,” Xu Ping explained as he rubbed his brother’s back. “Don’t mind him.”

The woman knew about the boy's condition and now felt even sorrier for these two brothers. She managed to get the doughnuts into the paper bag after all.

Xu Ping recognized the emotion in her face and accepted the gift with a smile. He pulled his brother along as he said goodbye.

"Is that your nephew?" asked a customer in the shop next door.

"Nephew? He's my godson!"

Xu Ping unlocked the front door and placed the bag of baozi on the dining table.

"Wash your hands before eating," he told his brother as he grabbed the kettle from the stovetop to boil the water.

It's almost time to change the gas, he thought to himself as he struck a match to light the stove.

He lifted the short blue cloth dividing the kitchen and living room to see his brother already sitting nicely at the table.

Xu Ping placed on the table the soy sauce and vinegar that he had prepared. "Show me your hands."

Xu Zheng flattened his palms in front of him. Xu Ping flipped them over and even inspected under the nails. "Okay. You can eat."

Xu Zheng was always particularly hungry after exercising, and soon half of the bag was devoured. Xu Ping had only eaten two before losing his appetite.

He pushed the bag closer to the younger boy. "All yours. Eat up."

He wiped the grease off his fingers and opened the curtains of the living room. The room immediately brightened up with dazzling light.

"Go take a shower after breakfast. You're going to learn to take it yourself. I won't be helping you from today on."

Xu Zheng took a bite out of the baozi in his hand and began chewing, cheeks stuffed round. He did his best to swallow but could not finish the half still in his hand.

"No more, *Gege*."

Xu Ping looked into the paper bag. “You only had seven. Are you sure you’re full?”

Xu Zheng put the remaining half back on the plate.

Xu Ping put his hand on his brother’s head, lips pursed in thought.

“All right. Go shower then, you smelly boy.”

He grabbed the half-eaten baozi and took a bite.

“Do you know how? The shampoo is in the blue container. The brown bar is soap. The left knob is hot water and the right is cold. I’ll help you get the temperature right. Wash your hair and then the rest of your body. The towel is on the rack. And don’t forget to close the curtains.”

Xu Zheng kept his head low and didn’t respond.

By the time Xu Ping finished eating the baozi, the water was boiled. The steam gushed out from the mouth and made a sharp whistling noise as it passed through the small hole on the lid.

Xu Ping closed the gas valve and poured the hot water into the green thermos on the counter.

He said seemingly casually to his brother, “*Da-Zhi* invited me to a game of basketball. Do you want to come with me?”

Xu Ping was sitting at the table doing a mathematics mock examination when he heard the water start splashing out into the tub.

He had his pen in hand for some time. The questions on the page seemed familiar, but his mind was blank.

He counted each line that the minute hand ticked past. Xu Zheng still had not come out after fifteen minutes.

He threw his pen onto the table and stood up so suddenly that the chair skidded back.

He ran to the bathroom and pushed open the door. The latch had been broken since this morning, and the door slammed onto the wall.

“*Xiao-Zheng!*”

His brother was sitting on the ledge of the tub with his head down. The hot water behind him was emitting waves of water vapour. The boy looked up dumbly and called, “*Gege.*”

Xu Ping’s nerves settled down, but his anger was ignited.

He shut off the tap and smacked his brother on the back of the head. “I told you to shower, not just sit there! You could’ve called for my help if you didn’t understand something! You think water’s free? You let it run for fifteen whole minutes!”

Xu Zheng looked rather happy to have been hit. He said “okay” and began taking off his clothes.

Xu Ping stood there watching his clumsy brother take off his shirt, undershirt, pants, and underwear. He saw his brother’s wide, solid shoulders, strong arms, slim waist, full hips, long, muscular legs, and the sizable member lying limp in the bushes.

He whipped around to leave after standing dumbfounded.

He heard his brother calling him from behind and was determined not to be fooled again.

“Take your shower properly unless you want a beating!”

Just as he was about to step out of the bathroom, he heard the water start and a small noise from his brother.

His brain told him: “Don’t be stupid. Xu Zheng will be fine.” But he still turned to look.

His brother had opened the hot water. The scalding water was splashing onto his skin which had become red.

It was already too late when he pulled the younger boy away. Xu Zheng stared at his own arm dumbly as though he did not understand what the swelling bubbles on his skin were. He reached his right hand to touch it.

Angry and hurt, Xu Ping grabbed Xu Zheng’s right hand. “Who told you to open the hot water first?! How many times do I have to tell you?! The cold side first!

Cold side! Why the hell can't you remember that?!"

He twisted the hot side close and the cold side open before sticking his brother's arm under the shower head.

Xu Zheng shuddered and held his brother's hand tightly.

"You dumbass! Idiot!" Xu Ping couldn't bear his frustration. "You're so stupid! Can you be any stupider?!" Meanwhile, he blamed himself inside. It was all his fault.

He dragged his brother along out of the bathroom and to their father's bedroom. He found the [green ointment](#) and plastered the burns with it, but even then he felt restless like a cat on hot bricks.

With his head tilted, Xu Zheng looked at his brother inspecting his arm in a nearly psychotic manner.

"Gege."

"What?!" Xu Ping shouted.

"It doesn't hurt at all."

Xu Ping looked up at his brother. His eyes were glimmering with moisture.

"You dummy," he said with a forced smile. "You don't even know what pain is."

Xu Zheng didn't care at all about his injury. He was just happy his gentle brother was back.

He waited in front of the kitchen sink for his brother to wash his hair for him like they had when he was younger. Only now, he was too tall to stand on the stool and had to bend his head down.

His older brother's fingers were long and cool. They felt like snowflakes melting on his nape when they massaged his scalp.

The windows by the sink were open. The sun was high up in the sky. Xu Ping could see the pots of green onions and sunflowers on the balcony of the home in the next building. He heard the neighbour singing along to the Peking opera, *Mu Guiying*, playing on the radio.

“The war drums thunder and bellow, waking the will and power in me to break the Heavenly Gates. Once upon a time, I had ridden my glorious warhorse, wetting my skirt with the blood of my enemies....”

He slowly poured a bucket of warm water over his brother’s head.

The sunlight cut over the counter at a slant, casting the shadow of the window on the ground.

Xu Ping swished the towel in the water several times and wiped away the extra water on his brother’s face.

Xu Zheng flashed a wide grin.

Xu Ping felt his face getting red and looked away.

Xu Zheng only had on a pair of square boxer briefs. He was sitting on the stool, waiting for his brother to wipe him down.



One brand of the green ointment mentioned in the chapter

[Live performance](#) of *Mu Guiying*. The lines mentioned in the story are the first four (0:24 - 0:45).

ayszhang: So, the important announcement is that I will be focusing on TDDUP until the translation is complete. This project will have to wait until I finish

TDDUP.

I have several reasons for doing so. Firstly, I think TDDUP is a story that deserves more attention because its prose is very well written and the historical setting requires more time and research, whereas that of Brother is more on the simple side. Another reason is that I would like to have time for myself. I have decided to pick up French again because I want to move to Quebec after graduation. I have also decided to start learning Ukrainian for someone special in my life.

I haven't told you lovely readers that it takes me around 20 hours to translate a chapter of TDDUP and 8 hours for Brother. Considering the fact that I also have 18 hours of lessons each week, I really feel like I have no time for myself.

I am not stopping altogether, but I will work at a much slower pace than before.

[Sixteen](#)

[Eighteen](#)



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18

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: Kai, Lee, m@o, Marcia



Chapter 18 of [Brother!](#)

Eighteen

“X Daily, lies and blasphemy! You cheat the people, heartless scoundrels! ‘Tis not the time for revenge! But when it comes, the people shall avenge!”

When Xu Ping pedalled past the People’s Square with his brother sitting at the back, people had already gathered in the tens of thousands, totally blocking traffic. A short-haired woman wearing a grey jacket and holding a red loudspeaker was standing in front of a white banner as tall as herself, inscribed with large characters in red ink, passionately shouting the chant towards the sea of heads before her.

Directly west of the square was the city hall and next to it was the office of the major local newspaper, X Daily. A towering liberation commemoration plaque

stood in the centre of the square, and on any other day, there would be flowers surrounding it. However, on this day the square was packed with people.

Stuck in a bicycle jam, Xu Ping hopped off like the other bicyclists and grabbed his brother's hand. "It's crowded here. You must not let go of my hand."

The woman with short hair descended the podium, replaced by a skinny, tall guy.

"Yesterday we left off at the topic of democracy. What is democracy? From what I see, the 'demo' means 'the people' and 'cracy' means 'power.' We, the people, need to take power!"

An overwhelming round of applause and cheering exploded among the crowd.

Xu Ping was stuck to the spot as though he couldn't believe his eyes.

Xu Zheng abruptly grabbed his arm.

Xu Ping turned around to find even more people massing in the square, many of which came on bicycles with red flags sticking out from the back on which were written the words "University of X!"

Xu Zheng was holding onto his brother's arm so tightly that his fingers sunk into the flesh.

"Don't worry. We're leaving now."

Pushing the bicycle, Xu Ping tried his best to squeeze through.

"Excuse me! Trying to get through!"

He pushed the bicycle with one hand while holding his brother's hand with the other.

There were many students wearing white headbands handing out leaflets. Written in black ink on their headband were two words: 'HUNGER STRIKE.'

"Please support our cause!"

One of these students came into Xu Ping's path and stuck a leaflet in his face.

"The country belongs to the people, and we are the people. My fellow student, please feel it in your heart to help us!"

Xu Ping took the leaflet and scanned it – HUNGER STRIKE: A STATEMENT.

He pushed the student back a little. “Out of the way, please. We are in a rush.”

He turned to look for his brother, and the boy appeared rather unsettled in the roaring crowd.

Xu Ping took his brother’s hand, interlocking all ten fingers. “No matter what happens, don’t let go!”

The two boys were half an hour late by the time they made it to the basketball court. Xu Ping locked the bicycle and saw a topless He Zhi running around after the ball. He found a stone bench under a shade tree for Xu Zheng to sit on.

He Zhi spotted Xu Ping and left the court after telling his teammates.

Xu Ping chuckled, “Sorry, *Da-Zhi*, we got stuck at People’s Square on the way.”

“I forgot to tell you.” He Zhi slapped his own thigh. “There’s been lots of students sittin’ in protest this week. All the roads are jammed.”

Xu Ping frowned without speaking.

He Zhi was a head taller than Xu Ping. He had an average face but was huge and stocky. His skin was dark with a bit of red tone as though he were burning coal.

He noticed Xu Zheng behind Xu Ping and leaned over to greet him. “Remember me, *Xiao-Zheng*? I’m *Da-Zhi-gege*. I used to go over to your house.”

It appeared as though Xu Zheng had not heard a thing.

Xu Ping kicked his friend. “What the hell are you saying, ‘*Da-Zhi-gege*?!’ ”

Da Zhi rubbed his buzzcut and started laughing.

“Your brother still doesn’t like to talk, huh. I thought it’d get better with time.”

Xu Ping stopped in the middle of stripping and replied lightly, “He always has been and always will be like this.”

He Zhi rubbed his nose, realizing he should not have said that.

Xu Ping took off his shirt leaving on the white tank top underneath. He slapped

He Zhi on the back. "Okay. Let's play ball."

Compared to his friend, Xu Ping had much paler skin and was a lot thinner. His shoulder blades were painfully visible on his back. Though he was not very tall, his proportions were well-balanced. Muscles hugged his bones snugly making him look like a skinny bamboo shoot.

"You look a lot skinnier than last time." With a frown He Zhi asked, "Is the review takin' a toll on you?"

Xu Ping took a ball from He Zhi and dribbled it a few times. "That's the entrance exams for you. I've been pulling all-nighters lately, but it'll be fine after the exams." He passed the ball back to his friend and nodded, "So are we playing or not?"

The basketball court belonged to the City Iron and Steel Research Institute, and a number of youths from nearby came to play on Saturday afternoons. White paint marked the court on the cement. Lush willow trees planted along the road lined one side of the court, their branches and leaves swaying in the gentle breeze.

Xu Ping stretched his body, loosening his limbs and neck, and jumped in the spot. The wind in May was still chilly and made goose bumps rise all over his skin.

The golden sunlight was coming from behind the building to the west. Xu Ping squinted as he waved to his brother.

Bonk! The ball bounced off the backboard and spun on the hoop before falling to the ground.

Xu Ping wiped at the sweat on his head and rested his hands on his knees while panting for air.

One of the players on the other team signalled to He Zhi and hollered, "We still got plans. Let's stop here."

He Zhi nodded and went to fetch the ball that had rolled out of bounds.

He brought Xu Ping along to sit down on the stone bench at the side. He took a water bottle from his backpack and took a sip before handing it to Xu Ping.

Xu Ping had sweated so much that his face was a bit pale. He took the bottle and chugged several mouthfuls. Then he dumped the little bit left over his head and ran his fingers through his short hair.

“Thanks,” he said, handing the bottle back to his friend. “I always end up drinking your water.”

“Don’t mention it.” He Zhi chuckled. “I haven’t seen you in ages. You’ve been super busy since you entered senior high. Can’t even get you to come out for a game.”

Xu Ping crossed his arms and rested them on his thighs as he smiled looking up. “If it were anybody else, I wouldn’t, but if it’s you, I’d come out no matter what.”

He Zhi laughed cheerfully.

The two friends fell silent. Xu Ping turned to look at his brother who was sitting like an elementary student with his palms flat on his thighs and head bowed forward. Relieved, Xu Ping turned back around.

“You have to hand in the application form at the end of this month, don’t you? What schools are you aimin’ for?”

Xu Ping watched some young men running on the basketball court. “I haven’t decided yet.”

He Zhi considered for a moment before saying reassuringly, “I’m not worried about you, though. You got good grades, so you’ll get in any school you apply to. Back in junior high, you even got into the provincial senior high that was one of the hardest schools to get into. My mom nagged me for three whole days, askin’ me why I wasn’t more like you.”

Xu Ping turned to look at his childhood friend.

He Zhi broke off a section of a willow branch above his head and swung it around for fun.

“How much did you score on the city-wide mock exam?”

Xu Ping said a number.

“Goddamn!” He Zhi swore.

He lowered his head in shame. “You’d have no trouble with the rank one schools. If you do well on exam day, you could even go to Tsinghua or Peking University. It’ll be hard for us to meet after you go to Beijing.”

“Quit your bullshit,” Xu Ping retorted calmly.

He Zhi chuckled and let out a sigh facing the sky. “My dad was right. I’m just not meant for school. Honestly, I barely got half of what you got on the mock exam. University is probably out of my reach, but my brother-in-law’s a police officer for the city. Through his connection, I’ll go to police academy and become a police officer after I graduate.

“What’s so bad about becoming a police officer?” Xu Ping lectured. “It’s an honourable job, and a lot of people want to but can’t become one. Plus, you’re a big guy with some great moves. You’ve always liked to stick your nose into other people’s beeswax, and you can’t even stay seated in a chair. You were born to be a police officer. It’d be a loss on the police department’s part if you didn’t join, and the people would surely rise in protest, too!”

He Zhi burst out in laughter. He slapped Xu Ping’s shoulder, asking. “Since when were you such a good talker?”

Xu Ping flung his friend’s hand off. “I’m being serious. Nobody has time to cheer you up!”

He Zhi sighed. “Well, you’d find out sooner or later, so I thought the sooner I tell you, the sooner I could get it off my chest.”

Xu Ping shot his friend a look. “What, don’t tell me you have stress, too?”

He Zhi only smiled.

“Oh, right, guess who I saw the other day, Ping-zi?”

“Who?”

“Our classmate from elementary, your arch-nemesis, Lu Jia!”

Xu Ping barely blinked and replied with an unenthusiastic “Huh.”

“The guy’s an entire different person. I didn’t even recognize him at first, but his square face and thick eyebrows are still the same. He just looked so dangerous, not like someone our age, you know.”

This intrigued Xu Ping. “What is he doing now?”

“His dad was dragged out of office during the [yanda](#) a few years ago, and his mom divorced his dad, taking his little brother with her. His grades weren’t good enough for senior high, so after junior high, he started a construction company with a relative. Now they’re going around buying up farmer’s properties.”

Xu Ping raised an eyebrow.

“You don’t say, he seems to have it goin’ good for ‘im. A gold chain ‘round his neck, a cellular phone in his hand. My dad and brother-in-law invited the admin of the police academy for a meal at the most expensive restaurant in town, and that guy was sittin’ at the table beside us, speaking fuckin’ Cantonese. Can you believe that?”

Xu Ping started laughing, too.

“Lu Jia speaking Cantonese?”

“Believe it or not! I didn’t even recognize him. He came up to me first and even drank a round with everyone. That guy’s got some tolerance to be drinking *baijiu* like water. His face didn’t even turn pink. He even gave me a card, that little bastard. It was fancy as fuck, had damn perfume and gold embossed shit. Said he was vice manager of some real estate company.”

“Which company?”

“I can’t remember, but he ain’t the big player. It’s his uncle or whoever. Heard my brother-in-law say his uncle won the city bid to build the intercity highway.”

Xu Ping nodded.

“Oh right, he asked about you, too. Says he wants to take you out for lunch some time and asked for your number.”

“What?” Xu Ping exclaimed. “Lu Jia wants to eat with me?!”

“Uh-huh, I was surprised, too. He hated you the most back then, had the most bones to pick with you, and he even bullied your brother. Now he’s acting like you two are best buds. What a load of horseshit!”

“And you gave him my number?”

“Hell, no! I told'im I forgot and left it at that. If you wanna take him up, I'll get into contact with him.”

Xu Ping thought about it with his nose crinkled up before asking, “What do you reckon Lu Jia has to do with me?”

He Zhi replied with a frown, “Not sure. But I have to warn you. He isn't the same Lu Jia we knew from elementary. You have to be careful 'cause he isn't one of us.”

Xu Ping flicked away the branch that fell on his head. “I know. I've known what kind of person he was since I was twelve.”

He took a glance at his brother again.

“I don't want to see him. If he asks for me again, get him off my back for me.”

He Zhi nodded.

Yanda, or "strike hard" are a series of campaigns by the Communist Party to combat high crime rates and general civil unrest. It has occurred four times so far: 1983, 1996, 2001, and 2010. The first swept through China beginning in July 1983. Lu Jia's father was probably caught in the last waves of the 1983 campaign that in reality extended for several years after 1983, though the majority of the action took place in 1983.

[Information on "strike hard"](#) (page 187)

[Student protests, hunger strike](#)

ayszhang says: By the time you read this, I will be in Singapore! Still not too late to arrange a hang out with yours truly :3 Will be in town until the night of the 19th!

[Seventeen](#)

[Nineteen](#)



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Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: Kai, Lee, m@o, Marcia



Chapter 19 of [Brother!](#)

Nineteen

The two friends sat for a while in silence.

Recalling the leaflet from earlier, Xu Ping fished it out from his pocket and began reading it.

“The country belongs to the people, and we are the people. Who will call out if not us? Who will act if not us?”

“Democracy is the highest form of existence, and freedom is a right we humans hold from birth, but must we exchange our youthful lives in return for them? Is this what we, the Chinese people, hold as pride?”

“Mother China, take a look at your sons and daughters! Hunger is ravaging

their youth, and death is pushing towards them. Are you going to stand by and watch?"

"What's this?" He Zhi asked.

Xu Ping passed the leaflet over.

"Somebody gave it to me when I passed by the square."

"Are you participating?"

Xu Ping shook his head.

"When I passed by, I saw a guy standing on the steps of the memorial plaque leading thousands of people below in a chant. You're not going to believe it, but I knew him. He graduated from my school."

"Really? Who?"

"Huang. Huang Fan. A year above me. I was a member of the student council in the first year. He was head of communications and later became president. Whenever the student council organized things like speech contests or singing competitions, he'd lead us during the process. When I heard his voice today, I recognized it straight away. He got into the University of X last year, and I even asked him for study materials. That was a couple months ago. I didn't think I'd see him in the middle of it all."

"You didn't go say hi?"

"I had Xu Zheng with me. What if I had lost him? Plus, there were so many people the entire square was packed."

"That many?"

"Yeah, and more were trying to join. I'd say there were over ten thousand."

He Zhi nodded. "For the past few nights, I've seen university students going on protests with torches in hand when I get up for a piss. Not only students. A lot of workers from the factory where my sister works are joining to protest the corrupt bureaucracy and crazy inflation or whatever. My brother-in-law's been so busy he hasn't come home. With so many people protesting, the police force has been stretched thin. They've even stopped all criminal investigations. Every officer has to follow the same orders."

He looked down at the leaflet.

“Strikers’ demands: 1) a sincere, concrete, and equal conversation between the university student representatives and the government as soon as possible, 2) a new, unbiased name for the student movement and confirmation that it is a patriotic and democratic student movement.”

“They’ve been on hunger strike for almost a week, right?”

Xu Ping hummed in affirmation. “A lot of universities have stopped lessons. The News Simulcast has been reporting nothing but this.”

“I wonder how this will end. I actually wanted to go, but my dad and brother-in-law wouldn’t let me no matter what. My sister even beat me up when she found out, said I’m an unappreciative little shit who’s going to get my brother-in-law in trouble. So I gave up that idea.”

“Your brother-in-law is really good to you, finding connections for you and all. You really shouldn’t make any trouble for him.”

“And what ‘bout you? You even know the leader of the students!”

“Yes, I’ll go and just leave Xu Zheng at home?!” Xu Ping retorted sarcastically.

“I’ve wanted to say this for a long time, Ping-zi. You put your brother too high up on your priorities. What about your life? You ever thought ‘bout that? Your brother’s almost sixteen, and he’s taller than you. Strangers would think he’s the older of the two! Sure, he has some problems with his head, but you’ve done enough. You can’t waste your whole life for him, can you?”

Xu Ping did not respond. He picked up the basketball from the ground and beckoned to his brother.

“*Xiao-Zheng*, come here. I’ll teach you how to play.”

“Spread your fingers, but don’t strain them. Very naturally, form a net. Good, like this.

“Now hold the ball with the thumb, index and middle fingers. Don’t let your palm touch the ball. Rather than holding the ball, it’s like the ball is being suction-cupped by your fingers.

“Now lift the ball with your right arm until your arm forms a right angle, like this.

“Very good. Now you can shoot. Use the wrist of your right hand for power and the index and middle fingers for aim. Your left hand just has to steady the ball and not interfere with the right hand....”

Slouching on the bench, He Zhi watched as his friend patiently taught his brother how to shoot a basketball.

Xu Zheng was very tall and handsome. When he had his eyes cast downwards, he looked completely normal, but from his slow reaction time, one could easily tell this boy was far from normal.

Bang! The basketball bounced off of the backboard straight down to the ground.

“Great stance, but too much force. Remember to use your wrist, not your arm, like this.” Xu Ping held his brother’s right hand and slowly went through the motions. “Feel that? Use your wrist to push the ball out.”

Xu Zheng nodded.

Xu Ping smiled and then fetched the ball back, placing it back into his brother’s hands.

“Try again?”

Time and time again, the ball hit the backboard and fell to the ground. He Zhi watched as Xu Ping fetched the ball again and again and averted his gaze.

He didn’t know how Xu Ping persevered all these years – taking care of the retard brother every day, teaching him to eat, to dress, taking him to school, playing with him. Just seeing his friend shoulder these burdens made He Zhi feel exhausted.

Clank! The ball rolled along the rim and for the first time, fell through the hoop.

Xu Ping began clapping and cheering for his brother.

As he patted his brother’s back encouragingly, he turned to He Zhi with a proud smile. “Hey, look, isn’t he clever?”

He Zhi quickly nodded in agreement.

Xu Zheng wasn't looking in his direction at all. Head slightly tilted, he was watching his older brother with all the attention he could give, his gaze focused and affectionate. The afternoon sun rained down making his body glow. Xu Ping swung an arm around the boy and said something to him. The two brothers appeared to be surrounded by an invisible bubble separating them from the rest of the world.

The sweet atmosphere felt oddly harmonious to He Zhi as though something crucial were happening right before his eyes, and he could not see it. He then studied the two for a long time but found nothing.

He had always respected this friend of his. He thought that although Xu Ping had a smaller body, he was brave and responsible like a real man. His mother died, and his brother was a retard. If it were any other kid, they would have given up long ago, but He Zhi had never heard a complaint from Xu Ping. If he were honest with himself, He Zhi knew he did not have it in him to commit even one-tenth of the love and patience that Xu Ping had given to Xu Zheng.

He Zhi shook his head and pushed the peculiar feeling away.

Xu Ping picked up the ball, lifted himself up onto his toes and shot the ball through the hoop beautifully. He did not have the stamina, but he had the intuition and skill.

He Zhi recalled the first time the two of them played basketball in junior high and the older kids passing by laughing at them.

It went by so fast. They were all grown up now and soon would go their separate ways without knowing when they would meet again.

He Zhi felt a sudden pang of sorrow. He crumpled the leaflet into a ball and left the bench dusting his butt.

"Hey, Ping-zi, let's play another round. One against two, you and your brother on one team. How 'bout it?"

"We're not scared of you! Give us your best shot!"

ayszhang: When you read this, I will be back in Tokyo ^^

[Eighteen](#)

[Twenty](#)



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20

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: JS, Kai, Lee, m@o, Marcia



Chapter 20 of [Brother](#)!

Twenty

The time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long.

—Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*

“I am a wolf from the North, roaming the boundless plains; the cold wind roars and the sand storm blows...”

The music woke Xu Ping making him sit up at his desk.

A few boys in the class had gathered around a desk in the corner listening to “Wolf” by Chyi Chin on someone’s cassette player.

It was break time between lessons. All the desks were piled with study material and mock exams. Looking down from the podium, they looked like fortresses built with paper. The course load in the final year of senior high was heavy, and many students were taking the opportunity during break to catch a few snoozes in their own book fortress.

“Xu Ping, the homeroom teacher wants to see you in her office.”

Xu Ping replied okay as he stood up rubbing his face.

Pushing open the wooden office door, he found Mrs. Li sitting at the desk in the corner marking the mock exam papers from yesterday.

“You were looking for me, Mrs. Li?”

Li Xiuyun pushed her [glasses](#) higher on her nose and said without stopping her pen, “Yes, you.”

She flipped through the pages counting the red minuses on each one and with her red pen wrote “76” on the first page and two lines under the numerals.

After she put the pen down, she looked through the stack of already graded papers to find Xu Ping’s. She laid it on the desk and stabbed at it with her finger.

“What’s wrong with you? How did you make such an elementary mistake?!”

Xu Ping picked the exam up and looked at the question circled in red.

“You solved the most difficult questions at the end, so how did you get the simple fill-in-the-blanks wrong?!”

Xu Ping put the paper back down and chuckled, “It was a careless mistake.”

“Careless!” Mrs. Li stabbed the paper again. “Careless won’t help you in the entrance exam! Do you know how many students in this province are trying to squeeze past the line? A one point deduction means you fall fifty, one hundred spots down the scale! You’re a smart young man, Xu Ping. Don’t let your future go to waste because of a bad habit like this!”

Xu Ping nodded and agreed profusely.

Li Xiuyun removed her glasses and hung them around her neck. “Let’s leave the exam for now. It’s Friday already. Almost everybody has turned in their

application form, but I haven't seen yours."

Xu Ping did not respond.

"You can talk to me if you have any troubles. I know your family background is special, but the application is a very serious matter, and you must treat it with utmost care. I had a talk with your dad on the phone the other day. With your scores, you can go to a very good school, maybe even Peking or Tsinghua. But I get the feeling that you have no such ambitions. Other kids are doing everything in their power to get into university while you are here hesitating when you already have one foot in the door."

Xu Ping rubbed his nose.

"Your dad told me about your situation, said you've been taking care of your brother since you were young. I was very touched by it. I'm fifty this year and have been teaching all my life. I've seen all types of students, and I have children of my own. I say this not as your teacher but as your elder, as someone with more life experience. Your dad spent all these years raising you not to become a good-for-nothing who only knows to care for your brother! Sure, you're not wrong to do so, but if you give up your own precious future for your brother, then you are the biggest fool in the world!"

Xu Ping's hands tightened for a moment around the side seams of his pants.

She pulled open the drawer and took out a stack of application cards. "I'm not supposed to show you this, but take a look at what Yang Qing wrote. His mock scores are lower than yours, but he was brave enough to put Peking as his first choice. What about you? Don't you have any ambition in you?"

Xu Ping pursed his lips.

"I'm not asking you to try for Peking, but Xu Ping, as your homeroom teacher, I will not allow you to take your future lightly." She slammed the drawer shut. "I want the application by Monday. Think about my words this weekend."

It was a little late by the time Xu Ping ended school. Lessons ended late almost every day in the third and last year of senior high school. Both the students and the teachers were stressed and wanted more hours in a day.

Throwing his deadweight backpack into the front basket, Xu Ping hopped on his bicycle and rushed off. By the time he arrived at the gates of the City's School for Special Education, the sky was pitch black.

Only a handful of windows still had light shining through. Xu Ping climbed the stairs two or three steps at a time to find his brother, back straight and knees together, sitting alone in the empty classroom.

"Xiao-Zheng."

Like a robot that was suddenly activated, his brother's head slowly turned around.

Xu Ping flashed a smile. "I'm here to pick you up."

Xu Ping took his brother by the hand and brought him to say goodbye to the teacher, Mrs. Cao, who was tidying up her materials in the office.

"Has your dad come back yet?"

"Not yet."

Mrs. Cao pointed to the bench in front of her. "Not so fast. I have something to talk to you about."

Xu Ping sat his brother down before joining him.

"How is it at home these days?"

"Fine. It's just that I'm about to take the university entrance exam, and there's a lot to do. My dad is still out of town filming and won't be back for a few more days."

Mrs. Cao nodded.

"Did my brother do something today?" Xu Ping probed.

"No." Mrs. Cao smiled. "Xu Zheng has always been very well-behaved in school. He doesn't like interaction, but he doesn't cause any trouble for us."

Xu Ping glanced at his brother, feeling slightly more at ease.

"Well, I think this is a matter I should discuss with your dad, but after some thought, I decided you should know, too."

Xu Ping leaned in a little. “Yes, Mrs. Cao?”

Hands criss-crossed at the knee, Cao Xue began softly, “It’s been eight years since Xu Zheng came to our school. Have you considered what he will do in the future?”

Xu Ping fell silent.

“Xu Zheng is fifteen already. If he were a normal kid, he’d be planning his future after junior high graduation, whether that’s heading to senior high and university, or enrolling in a college and finding a job. The mandatory education in our country is nine years. Our special ed program doesn’t follow the same guidelines, but it won’t continue to available forever.”

“Mrs. Cao, is the school budget running low? I can talk to my dad about it.”

Cao Xue chuckled. “Our budget is never enough, and there are far more children that need special help than we can take in, but as of now we can still pull through.” She gazed at Xu Zheng warmly. “I remember Xu Zheng was only this tall when he first came. You and your dad brought him here. He was clinging onto your hand when you two left and wouldn’t let go no matter what. You told him you’d pick him up after school, so he sat by the plants in front waiting for you. It was raining hard that day. Mr. Zhang and I were trying to bring him into the classroom, but he bit anyone who tried to touch him, even made Mr. Zhang’s hand bleed. In the end, there was nothing we could do, so I got an umbrella and waited outside with him.”

Xu Ping patted his brother’s head.

“Sorry for causing you so much trouble.”

“Well, it wasn’t trouble, really. I was thinking at the time that this boy was a loyal and devoted soul. A lot of people think that children with mental disorders don’t understand a thing, but that’s not true. They have feelings, too. They can feel joy and sorrow. They can sense who is good to them and who loves them.”

Head lowered, Xu Ping gently rubbed his brother’s hand.

“That’s why I know Xu Zheng and I have a special connection. Our school isn’t open to the general public nor is it non-profit. Our monthly tuition is not low, and many families who truly need help aren’t able to send their children to our

special ed program due to financial reasons. It's not that we don't want to help them, but we can only do so much."

"Is the tuition increasing next month?"

Cao Xue shook her head.

"Xu Ping, your brother is the oldest kid here. It shames me to say this, but we special needs educators can't do a whole lot. These kids mostly live in their own world, like a house with no doors. We can only do repairs from the outside, but we have no way of going in and turning on the lights."

"No, that's not true. You and the other teachers have done a lot, Mrs. Cao."

Cao Xue smiled.

"I like Xu Zheng very much, but the school can't become his parents. We can't take care of him forever. There comes an end to every party, Xu Ping, and you need to start considering Xu Zheng's future for him."

["Wolf"](#) by Chyi Chin

[ayszhang](#): Early surprise :)

Chyi Chin u Man, if only my mom read (incest) BL, she'd love this story!!! She's actually one year older than Xu Ping (if he was real), so she would definitely relate to this story.

[Nineteen](#)

[Twenty-one](#)



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21

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: JS, Kai, Lee, m@o, Marcia



SURPRISE!

Chapter 21 of [Brother](#)!

Twenty-one

It is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself, and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.

—Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*

One hand on the bicycle, one hand holding his brother's hand, Xu Ping ambled along the lightless street.

The night had swallowed up the last glow of twilight at the edge of the horizon, and tiny stars were twinkling weakly in the sky.

“What did you do at school today?” Xu Ping asked gently.

“Read.”

“What did you read?”

Xu Zheng answered after some thought, “The Little Mermaid.”

“Is that right? Would you tell me the story later?”

“Okay.”

It was the last weekend of May. Spring was coming to an end. The [crabapple](#) flowers had fully bloomed and were quietly shedding their lifeless petals, letting them fall to the dirt. A new round of life was itching to burst upon the streets and alleys of the city. Baby oleander buds had formed, and the slender leaves seemed to have been coated with a layer of green fatty gloss in preparation for this year’s burning summer sun.

Xu Ping stopped in front of a knife-cut noodle house and looked at the menu on the wall.

“I didn’t buy groceries today, so let’s eat here, okay?” Xu Ping turned to ask in a slightly tired voice.

The shop was not large, but the seats were clean.

The enthusiastic owner was quick to act. Seeing the new customers sit down, he brought over tea and appetizers – a plate of peanuts and a plate of spicy cucumber.

“Two noodles with beef tendon. One spicy, the other not spicy with extra onion and cilantro.

After taking down the order, the owner went towards the kitchen in the back.

Xu Ping slid two pairs of single-use chopsticks out from the bamboo holder, split one pair and carefully picked off the wood splinters before passing them to Xu Zheng. “Must be hungry, eh? Here’s some appetizers for now. The noodles are coming soon.”

He pushed the two plates towards his brother.

Xu Zheng held the chopsticks clumsily and with wobbly hands picked up a

single peanut, bringing it to Xu Ping's mouth. "Here, *Gege*."

Before Xu Ping could open his mouth, the peanut fell and bounced off the table to finally roll onto the floor.

Xu Zheng bent down to pick it up, but Xu Ping grabbed his hand and said, "It's dirty now. We'll leave it."

He waved at the owner and asked for a soup spoon which he stuck into his brother's hand. "A spoon's easier."

Xu Zheng filled the spoon with peanuts and held it up to his brother's lips.

Xu Ping turned his head and rejected softly, "You eat it. I don't like the skin."

Xu Zheng paused for a moment before saying, "oh." He then put the spoon down and started peeling the peanuts with those clumsy hands of his.

Xu Zheng had long fingers with nails trimmed close to the base. As he closed his fists, blue veins popped up on the back of his hands. He was wearing a white round-neck T-shirt that stretched thin around his wide shoulders. As he looked down, it did little to hide his slender, well-toned neck.

Xu Ping gazed at his brother in silence as a slightly bitter yet slightly sweet emotion filled him.

"*Xiao-Zheng*."

"Hm?" His brother looked up from the peanuts in his hand.

He started to speak but was interrupted.

"Xu Ping?" He felt a firm hand on his right shoulder.

Surprised, he whipped around.

A tall, skinny man stood behind him. Monolid, slanted long eyes. Average length hair. White shirt and blue jeans. His separate facial features were not very significant but when put together exuded a unique charm.

"President Huang?"

The man smiled. "I've graduated for how long now? I'm not the student council president anymore. Don't be so formal, and just call me Huang Fan."

Xu Ping quickly stood from his seat. “What are you doing here?”

Huang Fan nodded his head towards the back. “Here for dinner with some friends. We’re sitting further inside so you probably didn’t see us when you came in.”

Xu Ping looked in his direction and saw three people sitting at a square table in the back corner, one of which was the short-haired woman who was shouting chants the other day at the square.

With a hand on the younger man’s shoulder, Huang Fan took a good look up and down. “Haven’t seen you in two months. The review must be tough, huh? You look a lot thinner than when I last saw you.”

Xu Ping replied bitterly as he rubbed his eyebrow, “My friend said the same thing. But who doesn’t lose a few pounds before the entrance exams? It’ll be fine after July.”

Huang Fan patted his shoulder. “You’ll do fine. I have faith in you. Which school are you applying to?”

“I haven’t decided yet.” Xu Ping said crinkling his nose and casting his eyes down.

“Let me know if you want to apply to my school.” Observing the younger man’s expression, Huang Fan suggested, “I know the people in the school, and it’s close to your home. If you end up coming, it will be same as before. I can keep an eye out for you.”

Xu Ping pulled a smile but did not reply.

“Who’s this?” Huang Fan asked cautiously, moving his gaze to Xu Zheng.

“My younger brother.”

Huang Fan studied Xu Zheng for a second before smiling again. “It’s my first time meeting your brother. Your family is really good-looking. Needless to say, your dad’s an actor, but you two brothers stand out in a crowd like a flashlight in the dark, too.”

Xu Ping awkwardly pushed his glasses.

Huang Fan leaned in for a closer look. “Those aren’t prescription glasses, are

they?”

Surprised, Xu Ping took off the glasses. “Great observation. It’s the first time anyone found out by themselves. I had an accident and hurt my left eye. When my vision started declining I started to wear glasses, and then I got used to them so I’m still wearing them even now that my vision has recovered.”

Huang Fan calmly stared at Xu Ping’s face for a while before nodding with a smile. “They’re nice on you.”

Xu Ping put them back on his nose. “Actually I saw you a few days ago speaking through the loudspeakers at the People’s Square. I was passing by but didn’t say hi because of the crowd.” Then, after a pause, he asked in a lower voice, “Aren’t you supposed to be on hunger strike?”

Huang Fan’s face fell. “We stopped. Everybody would starve if we didn’t. The purpose of the strike was simply to show the government our determination for our request for democracy.”

Xu Ping didn’t know how to respond.

“So you already knew.” Huang Fan cracked a bitter smile. “I hadn’t contacted you lately because I was organizing the protest.”

Seeing the man’s drained expression, Xu Ping inquired, “What is it?”

Huang Fan thought about it for a moment. “It’s a long story. It’s good that we all have dreams and passion, but we have nowhere near the amount of money required for an event this large. The student body might look big, but the infighting is severe. There are a few leaders all on different sides, and nobody would listen to anyone else. There are even those who are here to gain fame for themselves. The hunger strike wasn’t done in the name of the Union either, but in the name of individuals. A while ago, some even wanted to restart the lessons. I had to send in the disciplinary team to block off all the lecture buildings to stop them. If not, the group would have fallen apart.”

Somewhere deep inside, Xu Ping knew something was off, but he only frowned.

Huang Fan returned it with a smile. “No need to worry about me. I still have bigger dreams to achieve. An obstacle like this won’t get in my way.”

“Isn’t your dream for China to achieve democratization?” Xu Ping asked, “What’s more important than that?”

But Huang Fan did not answer. His friends got up and paid the bill, and Huang Fan waved at them.

“It was nice running into you. Unfortunately we can’t talk much today. I collected some test questions and mock exams from previous years from my classmates. Come pick them up when you have time, or I could deliver them to you, too.”

Now Xu Ping was truly touched.

“I’ll go get them. Don’t want to trouble you.”

Huang Fan squeezed his shoulder lightly. “I told you not to be like that with me. Prepare well for the exam, and we’ll celebrate afterwards.”

Without waiting for Xu Ping’s reply, he turned and quickly left the noodle shop disappearing into the night.



Hall crabapple, *malus halliana*



Oleander



Knife-cut noodles

ayszhang: My last month in Tokyo! I can't wait to go home *u*

[Twenty](#)

[Twenty-two](#)



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22

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, Kai, Lee, m@o, Marcia



Surprise :)

Chapter 22 of [Brother](#)!

Twenty-two

Then they began to climb and they were going to the East it seemed, and then it darkened and they were in a storm, the rain so thick it seemed like flying through a waterfall, and then they were out and Compie turned his head and grinned and pointed and there, ahead, all he could see, as wide as all the world, great, high, and unbelievably white in the sun, was the square top of Kilimanjaro. And then he knew that there was where he was going.

—Ernest Hemingway, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*

“Please come again soon!”

The glass door closed behind them. With his stomach full of hot food, Xu Ping felt warm and lazy as though he were in a steamy sauna.

“Let’s go home.” Xu Ping turned around to tell his brother.

“Okay.”

The moon was especially bright tonight, and with the fragrance of jasmines hovering in the evening air, the ground seemed to be covered with a thin layer of snow. Although the past week had been tough and the following week was not going to be any easier, Xu Ping felt content for the brief period of rest.

As he unlocked the bicycle lock, he asked, “Do you want to ride the bicycle home or walk home?”

Xu Zheng kept his head low in contemplation.

Xu Ping looked up at the moon and said, “We haven’t taken walks in the evening for a long time. Let’s take a walk and digest some of this food.”

Without a peep, Xu Zheng reached forward to grab his brother’s hand.

The younger boy’s hand was different from Xu Ping’s in that it was constantly warm. Once upon a time, Xu Ping could easily wrap the boy’s fist in one hand, but now he had the impression that he wouldn’t be able to break free from the hand around his fingers.

When did his baby brother get this big?

“We haven’t measured your height and weight in a long time. Remember to drop by the health clinic next time we pass it.”

“Okay.”

He had taken his brother around on the back of the bicycle ever since he could remember, but recently he was beginning to find it taxing. He could no longer go over a hill by stepping harder on the pedal but instead had to let Xu Zheng off and walk the hill together.

Xu Ping put a palm flat on Xu Zheng’s shoulder and eyeballed his height. “I think you grew again this month. My head reached your eyes before, but now

it's only at your nose. If this goes on, you'll hit six feet before the end of summer."

Xu Zheng took his brother's hand from his head and placed it against his own chest.

After a moment of faltering, a bashful Xu Ping gently pulled his hand back.

"Okay, it's getting late now. We have to go home. Come on now."

He hurriedly pushed the bicycle along, but after a few steps he realized his brother wasn't following him. He looked back with the same haste.

Xu Zheng was standing in the same spot staring at his brother with a gaze so intent and still that Xu Ping felt his heart skip a beat.

"What's wrong, *Xiao-Zheng*?"

Xu Zheng stepped towards his brother and hugged the older boy before beginning to rub his head on his brother's shoulder like a dog trying to get its owner's attention.

Both a little annoyed and entertained, Xu Ping lifted his brother's face up. "What's wrong?"

Instead of answering, Xu Zheng took a few sniffs of his brother's shoulder and neck like a hound before burying his face again.

Xu Ping gave a few pushes, but the other boy would not budge.

"What is it? Something you want me to buy for you?"

Xu Zheng shook his head.

Xu Ping let the bicycle lean against him while he wrapped his arm around his brother.

"You know, *Xiao-Zheng*, you can tell me if you have any troubles." He rubbed his brother's back lovingly. "There's a lot I can't do, but if it's something I can do, I will make your wishes come true."

Xu Zheng muttered a quiet "okay."

"Did you get bullied at school?"

Xu Zheng shook his head.

“Did the teacher scold you?”

Xu Zheng shook his head again.

“Don’t like him.”

“Huh?” Xu Ping was confused. “Who?”

“He kept touching your shoulder! I don’t like him! Don’t like him!” As Xu Zheng said this, he kept nuzzling his brother’s shoulder as if he were trying to cover the scent of another dog who had invaded his territory.

It took Xu Ping a while before he recognized the situation. He pulled Xu Zheng up by the collar and chided, “You’re acting up ‘cause of that? You had me worried!”

He explained while pinching his brother’s cheeks, “That guy is my friend, and your brother isn’t a piece of antique art that can’t be touched.”

Xu Zheng continued his strong hug of his brother. He did not understand this bitter discontent inside him, and while Xu Ping did understand, the older boy could not say a thing.

Feeling a bit of bitterness but also sweetness, he patted his brother’s back lightly as he comforted, “All right now. You’re not a doggy, are you? Well, even if you are, I’m not your play bone.”

As expected, Xu Zheng could not grasp the metaphor. The boy only looked up briefly before embracing his brother tightly again.

He breathed in the fresh scent from his brother again and again, never tiring of it. The hand brushing along his spine brought this tingly feeling that slowly heated his body. Something vaguely familiar seemed to be racing and crashing around in his veins as though his flesh and bones themselves were declaring their desire for the person in his arms.

The bicycle toppled to the ground with a bang.

After a moment of silence, Xu Ping pushed Xu Zheng.

“Let go.”

Xu Zheng only tightened his arms.

“Are you disobeying me? I’m going to count to three. You’d better have let go before I do. One...two...”

Xu Zheng let go obediently and hung his head low like a child who had misbehaved.

Eyeing the tent in his brother’s pants, Xu Ping heaved a long, silent sigh.

He took off his own jacket and tied it around his brother’s waist.

“Don’t get horny in public,” he reprimanded as he straightened the bicycle.

Xu Zheng was still standing dumbly in the same spot.

Xu Ping reached for his brother’s hand but almost tripped and fell on his face.

“Gege, I feel bad.”

Sighing, Xu Ping ruffled the younger boy’s hair. “You’ve really grown up, all right.”

His dad had bought the [Phoenix](#) bicycle that Xu Ping used from a second-hand dealer. The black paint had mostly fallen off after all these years, the artificial leather on the saddle was so smooth from wear that it shone, and the bell on the handlebars had been replaced three times. Even the gold and red Phoenix logo had rusted and was not discernible under a coat of maroon grime.

He pushed the vehicle along the dimly lit road. Every few steps or so, the back wheel would make a *kuh-lunk* sound.

The chain seemed to have been knocked off, Xu Ping thought. It was too dark to examine closely.

What was supposed to be a walk had become an army march. When they passed by the Central Park, Xu Ping suggested to take a short break there.

The so-called Central Park was nothing more than a larger band of greenery and some trees and flowers sandwiched between two roads. A statue of a mother and son stood in the middle. Beside it was a set of children’s slide, seesaw and swing. The park was not far from Xu Ping’s house. Many parents

took their children here in the summer evenings to stay cool, but now the moon had climbed quite high in the sky. Most people had long gone home. The dazzling nightlife in the following decades represented decadence and corruption in these years. The old ways of thinking – the pure, the conservative, the insane, the radical, the good and the bad – were still deeply-rooted and refusing to leave anytime soon, preparing for a final battle with the new wave.

Xu Ping parked the bicycle, sat down on one end of the seesaw and beckoned to his brother, asking him to play with him.

His brother weighed quite a bit more than him and had to sit closer to the centre to reach balance. Although he was long past the age to play on the seesaw, he still felt an indescribable joy when he was catapulted into the air. Xu Ping burst out in laughter.

The brothers continued fooling around in the park. Xu Ping was thoroughly entertained by the sight of his brother working the seesaw earnestly. From his end of the seesaw, the action of kicking off with two legs looked a lot like a leaping frog, albeit an extremely handsome frog. But Xu Ping decided to keep that thought to himself.

He hopped off the seesaw and found that the slide was too narrow for him. Thankfully, the seats of the swing were wide enough. There were four lined up in a row, so he pulled Xu Zheng over.

Holding onto the rope with both hands, he lightly pushed off on his toes to start swinging. He looked up at the tiny dots in the sky and thought of the summer nights when the family gathered together in the courtyard. He would lie hand in hand with his brother tracing the Milky Way across the navy blue sky. He was silent, in awe at the brilliant beauty of the universe.

He turned to Xu Zheng who was only sitting on the swing, not swinging.

He slowed his own swing.

There were no more automobiles on the roads now, only the occasional bicycle rolling past under the streetlight making the shadows sway apart before coming together again. The fence along the sidewalk was crawling with ivy, and various spots of light were coming from the old residential building beyond it.

“*Xiao-Zheng*.”

“Mhm?”

“I’m going to university.”

Xu Zheng replied with a quiet hum, not having understood the meaning behind this.

“It’s not right away, but if everything goes well, I’ll leave home this September and move to the dorm at school.”

Xu Zheng’s head snapped to attention, and his eyes locked onto his brother.

“It will take four years. I might decide to further my studies after graduation. Master’s, doctor’s, it’ll take another six or seven years. I think I’m a book-person, so my future career will probably be in this field.”

Holding the ropes, Xu Zheng stayed quiet.

“I haven’t discussed this with Dad yet, but I think he will support me, because everybody thinks going to school, being an academic is a noble thing.”

Xu Zheng contemplated for a moment with his head down and replied, “Then I’ll go with you, *Gege*.”

After a long silence, Xu Ping began to explain, “You might not understand, *Xiao-Zheng*, but this world has its own rules. Some things everybody can do, some things nobody can do, and some things only some people can do. Going to university is one of those things.”

Xu Zheng thought about it for a long time but in the end shook his head. “I don’t get it.”

Xu Ping chuckled. “It’s fine if you don’t. This world’s a strange place, after all. There’s a set of invisible rules fixed around every person. You can’t see these rules, but they are very powerful. If they are broken, other people will start attacking you. Sometimes I don’t get it either.”

Xu Zheng lowered his head and started stabbing the sand with the toe of his shoe.

“Is there something you’d like to do? Painting? Or singing? Anything?”

Xu Zheng picked at the ropes. "I want to be with you, *Gege*."

Feeling heavy-hearted, Xu Ping did not know how to answer. He asked after long minutes, "What would you want to do if you were by yourself?"

After some deep thought, Xu Zheng replied weakly, "I don't know. Where did you go, *Gege*?"

Xu Ping stared at the night sky for some time. "If I'm not with you one day, what would you do?"

"Go looking."

"What if I went somewhere far, far away, and you can't find me?"

Xu Zheng faltered before replying. "I go look for *Gege*."

"What if you couldn't find me no matter what?"

He stopped there.

Slowly, Xu Zheng bent over and clutched his head with both hands.

A car drove past, its glaring headlights scaring a bird perched on a tree. It let out a loud *gawk* as it flew away.

Xu Ping dusted his pants off as he stood up. "Never mind. Don't think about it. All meaningless questions anyway."

He grabbed his brother's hand. "Let's go home. It's late already. I still have some mock exams to do tonight."

But Xu Zheng did not stand up when his brother pulled him. He lifted his head up from between his hands and called, "*Gege*."

"Hm?" Xu Ping hummed with a smile.

Xu Zheng shot forth from the swing like a bomb crashing straight into Xu Ping. Caught completely off guard, Xu Ping was knocked back a few steps and fell backward. The two brothers tumbled to the ground.

Hurt from the fall, Xu Ping couldn't help punching his brother. "What the hell?!"

Xu Zheng only hugged his brother tightly without saying a word.



An old model of the Phoenix



The Phoenix logo

Tung Sheung Cycle Company [website](#)

ayszhang: You might be wondering why Brother is taking me so long. That's because I've been working on the prequel of [TDDUP](#) too! I will most likely release it when it has largely been translated because of some technical (translation) issues.

[Twenty-one](#)

Twenty-three



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23

Translator: ayszhang

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By now it's not that much of a surprise :3

Chapter 23 of [Brother](#)!

a bit of nsfw

Twenty-three

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness!

—Matthew 6:19-23

Xu Ping had very nice writing style and even won first place in a pen calligraphy competition in junior high. The prize was a notepad, the inside cover of which bore a huge “PRIZE” stamp and a note from the head counsellor: Congratulations Xu Ping! May you continue to achieve greater heights!

Xu Ping later on ripped out every page of that notepad to teach Xu Zheng paper folding.

Xu Zheng was not slow at learning things that didn't require abstract thinking. Folding, pulling open, pressing flat, flipping over – the two brothers carried the armful of paper airplanes to the balcony and sent them out into the warm, gentle afternoon breeze, watching them glide and swirl like dandelion fluff. Only the very first unsuccessful airplane was kept. Xu Ping wrote on its wing, “Xu Zheng, July 1985,” and safe kept it in a box.

There were many more memorabilia inside that box.

It was a blue pastry box made of some kind of metal, a gift from a fan of their dad's. The precious imported item was covered in a flowery script of a foreign language. Each treat inside was wrapped in lily-white macramé lace. His dad had given it to his six-year-old brother without taking a single bite, but his brother in turn offered everything to him.

Xu Ping shut the lid tight and stuck the box into the cupboard.

The light was off in the room he shared with his brother. Xu Zheng was probably asleep.

He grabbed the doorknob, but after a moment of thought, he retracted his hand.

Xu Zheng was silent the entire way home. Xu Ping tried to talk many times, but it was as though his brother did not hear a word.

Normally, he would do homework at the table outside while his brother played with the radio in the bedroom. That night, Xu Zheng sat on the couch with the radio refusing to leave. At first, it was the inconsistent sound of the radio

switching frequencies. Then it was the low voice of a male newscaster reporting the news before quickly seguing into a female opera singer's shrill voice singing "[*My Motherland*](#)." Caught off guard, Xu Ping stabbed a hole in the paper with the tip of the pen. The ink blot was so big he could not wipe it clean.

"Xiao-Zheng, go play inside. I've got work."

Xu Zheng's head bobbed up once, but no response came.

The radio went silent. Xu Ping dug into his mock exam, ignoring the minor fit his brother was throwing.

The final question on the exam was a very complex algebraic proof. Xu Ping had had no luck going at it from several directions, and after filling three pages with brainstorming, he still had no idea. He was so frustrated he tore a few hairs from his head. He glanced at his watch to find it rather late, and he had not completed even a half of what he had planned to do. The frustration bugged him to no end, like caterpillars crawling all over.

He turned to his brother.

Radio parts were lying all over the coffee table and the couch. Screwdrivers, pliers, and red and yellow wires attached to the battery and circuit board. The speakers had been taken apart from the radio set. Xu Zheng paid no attention to the mess and was walking in circles around the couch.

"What's wrong?" Xu Ping frowned.

Xu Zheng kept his head down without answering.

Although his rational mind told him to ignore his brother and hurry with the mock exam, Xu Ping still stood up as though he suddenly developed OCD.

"What are you looking for? I'll help you."

One of the four screws securing the circuit board had fallen. Smaller than a pea and coated with black paint, it was nearly invisible against the cement floor. Lying on his stomach with his arm stretched underneath the couch, Xu Ping had to search inch by inch until he found it. He was covered in dust, and his knees were sore, but when he gave the nail to his brother he didn't receive a thank-you or a smile.

Taking the screw from Xu Ping's palm, an unhappy Xu Zheng sat back on the couch and continued his project with the radio.

Xu Ping paused with his brows furrowed wanting to say something, but in the end, he stopped himself.

Forty wasted minutes later, he still could not find the solution to the final question on the exam. He glanced at his watch. It was his brother's bedtime. The unproductive night left Xu Ping feeling rather defeated.

He threw the pen down and said in an exhausted tone to Xu Zheng, "Time to wash and get ready for bed."

If Xu Ping could say that his brother ignoring him earlier was his imagination, then now he could say for certain that Xu Zheng was working against him on purpose.

When undressing to take a shower, two buttons popped off because the younger boy was too rough with the shirt. Xu Ping saw and tried to help but was hit in the eye by the sudden lift of an elbow. More than once the boy had been told not to touch the hot water, but once Xu Ping looked away, he twisted the tap. The boy was fine, but Xu Ping got his arm burned from protecting his brother. Xu Ping bore the pain and washed his brother, but Xu Zheng kept knocking over the shampoo and soap as if he had hyperkinetic disorder.

By the third time he had to pick up the soap, Xu Ping was angry. "What the hell is it with you?!"

Xu Zheng looked down and did not speak. His damp hair clung to his head. His body might have become strong like a man's, but his face still carried child-like innocence.

Doing his best, Xu Ping managed to push his fury down.

He hurriedly clawed his brother's scalp knowing it would irritate his brother, but he only hoped to clean the boy and send him off to bed sooner.

A lot happened today. Intensive periods of writing mock exams, then reviewing them, then writing more exams. The talk with his homeroom teacher. Picking up his brother, and the talk with his brother's teacher. Running into Huang Fan who

was head of the student movement. His brother getting jealous. The bicycle breaking. Breaking the news about university to his brother, and his brother's difficulty accepting that fact. His brother throwing a fit...

By then, Xu Ping's physical stamina and mental patience were nearing depletion. What he wanted more than anything was to jump under the blankets and sleep like there was no tomorrow.

But clearly Xu Zheng did not plan to cooperate.

After the forceful shower, Xu Zheng's expression only became worse. Shutting the water, Xu Ping asked his brother to step out and dry off. Xu Zheng stayed in the tub, dripping wet. He pulled on his brother's shirt sleeve but looked in another direction. "Sleep with me, *Gege*."

Xu Ping faltered for a moment before casting his eyes down. "No."

"But you always did before."

Xu Ping replied coldly as he took the bath towel from the shelf and shook it out, "I won't anymore. You have to learn to sleep alone, and you have to learn to take your own showers. I won't always be with you, so you have to learn to take care of yourself."

Xu Zheng stayed silent with his head down, but the next moment, he shoved Xu Ping and ran out, still dripping wet.

Xu Ping fell back on his butt and only saw the watery footprints on the ground when he recovered.

When he chased after the boy with the towel and a change of clothes, he found his brother sitting with his legs splayed wide open on the couch, showing off his dick.

Xu Ping felt something snap.

"Close your legs! What do you think you're doing?!" Xu Ping barked at his brother.

Xu Zheng glared back.

Xu Ping did not back down. "What're you looking at? You think you're in the right?"

Xu Zheng whipped his head around so as to not see his brother.

Xu Ping tossed a pair of underwear to Xu Zheng. “What’re you doing naked? Put some pants on!”

Xu Zheng held the garment for a moment and then threw it on the ground.

Xu Ping froze as the fury boiled inside him.

“Pick it up.”

Xu Zheng tilted his head while looking at him. Xu Ping discovered for the first time that his mentally challenged brother could show such a defiant expression.

“Are you going to pick it up or not?”

Xu Zheng turned his head back around without a care.

Xu Ping scoffed out of anger.

“Xu Zheng, if you pick up the underwear and put it on now, I can pretend like nothing happened tonight. But if you don’t...”

Xu Ping trailed off.

Xu Zheng considered with his head to the side and then stood from the couch. Xu Ping thought the boy was going to grab the underwear and was about to breathe a sigh of relief when his brother put one foot on it. The boy flashed a challenging glare before jumping on it repeatedly.

“*Gege* is liar! Liar!”

“What did you say?!” Xu Ping was infuriated. “Say that again!”

Paying no heed, Xu Zheng kept shouting. “I don’t wear pants! You don’t like me wearing pants! You like my weenie! You touch it at night while I sleep! I know!”

As though struck by lightning, Xu Ping stood there, gaping.

Ever since he had the unspeakable dream, Xu Ping had moved out of their bedroom. But even so, he would still wake up with a fright in the middle of the night having dreamt a similar dream. Sharing a loving kiss with his brother, stripping each other naked and caressing each other’s bare skin – just that was sufficient to make him tremble with so much excitement in the dream that he

could shed tears of joy. He clearly understood that it was wrong and kept it at bay during the day, but at night it all spilled out. He would masturbate furiously while calling out his brother's name while the boy was asleep in the room. As long as he imagined that the hand around his penis belonged to his brother, he was able to achieve orgasm very quickly. During the day, he had to play the good brother who took care of his younger brother, but at night he lusted after his brother's body. Many times he made up his mind to stop this shameful behaviour, but time and time again he failed to do so.

"I let *Gege* touch my weenie. *Gege* sleep with me!" The boy who understood nothing of this world kept shouting.

Xu Ping was shaking all over while he cradled his head.

"Shut up."

"I like when *Gege* touch me."

"Shut up!"

"Sneaky *Gege* kissed me, too."

"Shut up! Shut up! I told you to shut up!"

He leapt over the couch to beat the boy, but his brother dodged it nimbly. When he lunged forward, the boy would back away. Every time he thought he had cornered Xu Zheng, the boy would always find a way to deftly slip out of his grasp.

Seething with anger, Xu Ping grabbed the glass ashtray from the television shelf and hurled it. Xu Zheng ducked, and the ashtray smashed into the wall. A fragment flew over his shoulder, leaving a long gash along his neck. His hand flew to the wound to find it wet with blood. He froze with shock.

Taking this opportunity, Xu Ping jumped on his brother, both of them falling to the ground, and planted a heavy punch while holding down his shoulder.

Xu Zheng's head flew to the side.

Xu Ping struck again.

"What do you know?! Nothing! You idiot! Idiot!"

Holding his own face, Xu Zheng turned his head around, his eyes full of hurt, fury and disbelief.

“I’m not!”

“You are! I hate you! I hate you as a brother!”

Xu Zheng stared at his brother for a silent second and then, letting out a roar, he kicked Xu Ping over. The naked boy straddled his brother and began pounding his face. Xu Ping raised his arms in defence but had his arms pushed aside. The younger boy was extremely strong. He restrained Xu Ping’s wrists with one hand, and Xu Ping could not break free. A fist repeatedly smashed into Xu Ping’s face, and his teeth seemed to come loose.

The crazed boy only was bent on venting his fury and hurt and kept throwing punches with all his strength. It was all a big lie – *Gege* whom he relied on and adored, *Gege* who promised he would always be with him, the only existence in his life, the most precious light in his world. He might not have known what the “university” that his brother spoke of was, but he knew his brother was going to abandon him for it. Xu Zheng felt a pain in his chest that he could not bear. He wanted to scream, but he couldn’t. It felt like a part of him had been carved out, but when he checked everything was still in place.

His hands, his legs, none of them were his anymore. He beat the boy underneath him as though he were possessed. Only when blood came spewing out of Xu Ping’s mouth did he come to a halt, his illusion dissipating.

The glass lens on Xu Ping’s eyeglasses was cracked, and his eyes were swollen. He lay there for some time before weakly reaching a finger into his mouth, checking each of his molars.

Wiping away the blood around his mouth, he spoke quietly with a lisp. “Thankfully the teeth are intact. I just bit my tongue.”

He panted for a while longer before lightly nudging his brother who was still sitting on him. “Get off.”

Dumbly, Xu Zheng stood up.

“Put on your clothes.”

Xu Zheng picked up the underwear and clumsily pulled it up his legs.

When he returned, Xu Ping was attempting to stand.

Xu Ping felt a whirling sensation.

It'd better not be a concussion, he prayed.

He evaded the hand stuck out to help him. He grabbed on to the table leg and stood up, took two steps and felt sick to his stomach.

Standing helplessly to the side, Xu Zheng appeared surprised, pained and afraid.

"Gege."

Xu Ping did not respond.

"Gege."

Xu Ping sat resting in a chair for some time. Then he suddenly started laughing towards the ceiling. The action pulled at the injury in his mouth turning the laugh into pained hisses as he inhaled.

Xu Zheng might have been the most stupid person in the world, but even he knew he did something terrible.

Xu Ping scoffed, "You should be happy that you won a fight. Why the puckered face?"

He flipped over a glass on the table and poured himself some water to wash away the rusty iron taste.

"Gege."

Xu Ping wanted to stand up, but his legs were soft like noodles.

"Gege."

The wall clock rang twelve times. Xu Ping realized that the day in fact had only just ended.

"Gege."

"Shut the hell up!" Xu Ping snapped as he slapped the table.

Xu Zheng hung his head low and dared not make another sound.

Xu Ping said to himself.

Don't be like this. He's just a dummy. No need to get angry with him! You should be happy! Look how well you've taught him! All these years, all the efforts you spent on him, telling him not to take a beating, wasn't it all for this? He's grown up now, and he can protect himself without you beside him.

He sprawled onto the table with his face in his arms.

I'm not sad. He thought. I'm just tired. So tired. It's been too long of a day today. I think I need a rest.

My Motherland ([youtube](#) and [wiki](#))

ayszhang: Ugh, listening to that song brings back so many memories...and not necessarily good ones lol. Can you imagine, they still perform this at the year-end concerts for Chinese New Years =.=

[Twenty-two](#)

[Twenty-four](#)



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Translator: ayszhang

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Chapter 24 of [Brother!](#) ><;

Twenty-four

That which has been *is* what will be,

That which *is* done is what will be done,

And *there is* nothing new under the sun.

Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this *is* new”?

It has already been in ancient times before us.

There is no remembrance of former *things*, Nor will there be any remembrance of *things* that are to come By *those* who will come after.

Xu Ping thought he would lie in bed wide awake until the sun rose, but he fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

He did not dream. Like a robot out of energy, he lay on the bed with hands crossed over his stomach and did not move a muscle during the night.

When he awoke, he heard the sound of the street cleaning machine whirring by.

May was coming to an end.

Sunrise came earlier and earlier, and the temperature was also increasing. The moist spring had slowly disappeared like the sparrows fluttering among the trees while the young summer sun grew with intensity in the crisp southeastern wind.

There was always a lot to do on the weekend between the seasons. The long sleeves needed to be stored while the short sleeves needed to be brought out. The thick winter blankets needed to be taken apart and washed. The bamboo sheets and sandals needed to be taken out to the balcony to drive out the dampness that had collected during winter.

He stared at the old yet unfamiliar crack on the ceiling. Only after blinking a few times did he remember he had long ago moved into his dad's room.

The sunlight shot in between the curtains. Regardless of what he wanted, a brand new day had begun.

Xu Ping slowly sat up in bed and instinctively reached out to the bedside table for his glasses. There was nothing there waiting for him. His brother had broken them yesterday.

Retracting his hand, he sat silent for a while before taking the clothes from the back of the chair and dressing himself. The door to his brother's bedroom was still closed.

He walked into the bathroom, squeezed out some toothpaste, opened the tap and filled a cup with water. Then he began to brush his teeth.

In the mirror above the sink was a person with sickly white skin, a small

pointed chin and bright eyes. Perhaps because of genetics, Xu Ping's skin was very fair and did not suffer from pimples even when he pulled all nighters.

His neck was unusually slender for a man, and his jaw line from the side was elegant beyond description. Although he was not breathtakingly handsome like his dad or brother, there was a certain graceful purity that made him seem out of place in this mortal world.

Xu Ping spat out the foam and cupped some water to splash his face. It still hurt where his brother hit him yesterday. At the corner of his left eye was a bluish bump. The cut on his lips had not healed and was a deep purple today.

He gently dabbed his face with a towel and then looked into the mirror at himself. He froze for a moment before quickly looking away as though disgusted.

Eyes downcast, he pulled open the bathroom door and stepped out, bumping straight into a warm body.

For some reason his brother was naked standing outside the bathroom.

Xu Ping hurriedly took a few steps back.

Neither of them spoke.

Then Xu Ping broke the silence chuckling, "All right, hurry up and wash up. I'm going to make breakfast."

Eyes pointed down, he nudged his brother aside and slipped away.

The breakfast menu today was rice porridge and other appetizers. A pot of golden yellow porridge stood beside a few small plates of cucumber, bamboo shoots and wheat gluten balls.

Xu Zheng had a big appetite and normally could eat every last morsel, but this morning he only stirred his bowl of porridge with the spoon, seemingly not hungry.

Xu Ping kept his eyes down at his food and finished breakfast before his brother for once. He stood up and gathered his dishes. "Take your time. I have something to do."

He was passing by Xu Zheng when the boy caught his wrist.

Xu Ping pulled his hand free asking, “What?”

“You take me to run in the morning, *Gege*.”

Xu Ping pursed his lips. “Sorry. I forgot.”

He actually forgot. Somehow he had forgotten the long-observed routine.

Xu Zheng made to grab him again, but he stepped back and spoke flatly facing the kitchen, “Could we skip today? I’ve lots to do.”

With that he started towards the kitchen with his dishes in hand, but his brother shot forward and hugged him around the waist.

CRASH. The dishes shattered on the floor.

Both of them froze, shocked.

Xu Ping tore away from his brother’s grip and squatted down to pick up the broken porcelain, muttering, “Look at what you’ve done! Now the dishes are broken. Don’t run up to me and hug me like that again. Go drink your congee. We’re not going running today.”

Xu Zheng didn’t speak.

He knew very well that the younger boy was staring at him fixedly, but Xu Ping didn’t want to turn around.

He heard his brother sitting back on his seat and picking up the spoon.

He had to live on even if it was painful. The person behind him was his brother with whom he was connected by an invisible bond of blood. With that in mind, he felt the air in the living room thinning and scurried off to the kitchen with the broken pieces of porcelain.

The morning slipped by along with the tick tock of the swing clock.

Xu Ping locked himself in the room and completed two mock exams, effortlessly solving the question that had challenged him last night. The more troubled he was emotionally, the better he could focus, as though he were channeling all the unspeakable feelings out, as ink, through the tip of his pen.

His brother did not knock on his door. He breathed a sigh of relief, but at the

same time his chest felt congested as if he had an asthma attack and could not get enough oxygen no matter how much air he was breathing through his gaping mouth.

Lunch was eaten in silence.

His brother sat across from Xu Ping in a white T-shirt, clumsily pushing rice into his mouth. Neither had lessons because it was the weekend, and so the day seemed to last even longer.

Some noises came in through the open window. One of the units had purchased a new refrigerator, and its tenants were hollering at the workers to carefully move the machine upstairs.

Xu Ping was leisurely washing dishes in the kitchen while his brother was sitting on the couch watching the noontime [*Animal World*](#).

The topic of today's show was the reproduction of lions.

"The lioness goes into heat only once every two years, and the male lion follows her like a shadow. Each session of intercourse lasts only a few minutes, but the number of sessions each day can easily exceed fifty..."

After cleaning his hands, Xu Ping took off the apron and hung it on the kitchen door.

Eyes pointed down, he straightened his sleeves while saying to his brother, "I'm going out for a bit."

Xu Zheng's head turned around and he asked slowly, "Where are you going, Gege?"

"A friend's house to get some study materials."

Xu Zheng stood up from the couch.

"I'll go by myself. You don't need to come."

Xu Zheng paused and considered for a moment before letting his head droop. "Oh."

Xu Ping pursed his lips but still reminded, "You stay home, all right? I'm taking the keys with me, so don't open the door if someone knocks. I'll deal with

whatever it is when I come home.”

Xu Zheng showed his acknowledgement.

The expression on the boy’s face, like that of a dog abandoned by its owner, gave Xu Ping a pang. He quickly whipped his head around.

The river bank was lined with lots of weeping willows whose baby green leaves were swaying in the breeze.

The bicycle was broken. When he headed out, he noticed the chain on the back wheel had fallen off, so he had to walk to get anywhere.

Xu Ping stood on the rocky bank, the breeze sweeping across the river to rustle his hair and create golden ripples in the green water.

Behind him was a young mother pushing a stroller along the path, a couple snuggled together chatting on the bench, and a student from a nearby university rushing off with a backpack slung across his shoulder.

Xu Ping picked up a flat pebble and flung it. The stone skimmed the water three times before plopping into the water.

“Young comrade, could you take a photo for us?”

Xu Ping nodded and took the camera.

It was a family of three who had come out on an adventure on account of the good weather. The young boy had his arms around his mother’s neck as she carried him in her arms.

“Ready, one, two, three!”

When he reached three, the young couple began smiling on cue, but the two-year-old started causing a ruckus for some reason.

“What’s wrong? Are you feeling okay?” the mother cooed.

“Bingtanghulu!” the child screamed.

“Yes, yes, yes. I’ll buy you one in a bit,” the mother promised.

“No you won’t! You’re always doting on him! He can’t even take a walk without being carried. He sees something he wants to eat and starts crying right

away. What's gonna happen if this becomes a habit, huh?!"

"Oh, get outta here! You just don't wanna spend that extra money! He's a baby still! So what if he eats a bingtanghulu? I'll buy it if you're too petty to spend the money for your son!" The woman who was kind and gentle to her son suddenly turned and began scolding her husband.

"What do you know?! What do you mean I don't wanna spend the money?! I just wanna set a good example for him! His mom only knows to spoil him, and we all know nothing comes out well from over-spoiling your kid! Do you understand?"

Just as the argument reached its peak, the son suddenly let out a piercing cry, and the two quickly turned to him and started to soothe him.

This trivial conversation completely filled Xu Ping with a sense of loneliness. He passed the camera back and continued slowly along the bank.

Telling his brother that he needed to retrieve some materials was an excuse for him to leave the house. It was as though a whirlpool formed wherever Xu Zheng was. It sucked away all of his emotions and energy, but the more he fought, the quicker he sunk. Gradually, it felt as if the space around him and the oxygen he breathed were being taken from him. But to whom in this world could he tell his pain?

He stood on the road, looking all around him, and found that he had nowhere to turn.



Fried wheat gluten balls



Bingtanghulu sold on the street

For more information:

[Wheat gluten](#)

[Bingtanghulu](#)

ayszhang: We're past 40% of the story! ^o^ I'm flying home on the 29th, leaving Tokyo for good! Might take a few days to recuperate before translating again, so the next next chapter will be on Sept 3

[Twenty-three](#)

[Twenty-five](#)



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Translator: ayszhang

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Chapter 25 of [Brother](#)!
And the plot thickens...

Twenty-five

The fly is thy brother. Do it no harm. The wild birds that roam through the forest have their freedom. Snare them not for thy pleasure. God made the blind-worm and the mole, and each has its place. Who art thou to bring pain into God's world?

—Oscar Wilde, *The Star-child*

The red traffic light turned green. Huang Fan stepped on the pedal and zipped through the intersection among the flow of bicycles. After turning right onto a

small road in front of the University of X's back entrance, the number of bicycles on the road decreased substantially. The white flowers of the pagoda tree on either side of the street were on the verge of withering, and when the wind blew the petals swirled around in the air like snowflakes.

But Huang Fan was not in the mood to appreciate this.

Residential houses lined the road. Laundry and some plants could be seen from the fifth-floor deck.

He turned at a certain metal gate.

After parking his bicycle, he grabbed his backpack from the basket and ran up the stairs, taking multiple steps at once. Soon, the hand stopped rummaging in his pockets for the keys.

There was someone sitting in front of Room 302. Short, luscious, black hair. White shirt, black pants. Head buried between his knees, showing his slender, pale neck, it was like a crane landing in the yard on a snowy night.

Huang Fan held his breath for some time and then called softly, "Xu Ping?"

Xu Ping's fingers twitched, and he slowly raised his head from his knees.

Seeing the younger man's face, Huang Fan's eyes narrowed, but he stopped himself, only smiling. "What a surprise. Why did you come all of a sudden?"

Xu Ping pushed on his knees and stood up, dusting off his pants. "Sorry, I didn't even give you a heads up. I just wanted to grab the study materials from you, and I didn't have anything to do on Saturday, so..."

Huang Fan fished out his keys to open the door. "You really should've told me beforehand. What if I came back really late? Then you would've come for nothing. You didn't wait for long, did you?"

Xu Ping faced away. "Not long. I was just in the neighbourhood and thought I'd give it a shot. If you weren't here, I'd have left."

Huang Fan eyed the tiny white petals on Xu Ping's shoulders, but he didn't want to expose the lie.

The unit had one living room and two bedrooms and was very tidy. On the coffee table were many books on quantum mechanics and advanced calculus

and a very thick English-Chinese dictionary.

Huang Fan closed the door behind Xu Ping and took off his dark jacket. "You picked a bad time to come. My roommate just so happens to have gone back home and wasn't here the entire day today. Otherwise, he could've let you in."

Xu Ping smiled a little stiffly.

Huang Fan gestured at the couch. "Sit. Anything to drink?"

Xu Ping shook his head. "No, thanks. You must be busy. I'll get the materials and go."

Huang Fan faltered for a moment. "We can't have that. I've been looking forward for your visit this whole time." He went in the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. "How's beer?"

Xu Ping didn't want to be picky since this wasn't his house, so he nodded. "Sure."

Grabbing two bottles of Tsingtao, Huang Fan easily uncapped the bottles and placed one in front of Xu Ping.

Xu Ping said thanks.

The dark green glass was icy to the touch. Holding the bottle, Xu Ping hesitated before taking a sip.

It was cold and bitter, and the smell of alcohol shot up his nostrils.

He couldn't hold back a cough.

Huang Fan chuckled. "What, don't tell me it's your first time drinking beer?"

A little embarrassed, Xu Ping chuckled and nodded meekly.

Huang Fan stared steadily at the younger man from another couch on the side. "Nobody's used to the taste at first, but you'll learn to enjoy it after a few more sips. Some days when I get home and I'm stressed or tired, I just need a nice bottle of beer."

Since it was a kind offer, Xu Ping could only oblige. The golden liquid slid down his throat, and if he ignored the bitterness, he did find a certain refreshing taste. He had sat outside the door for some time and indeed was thirsty. Before

he knew it, he had finished the bottle.

Huang Fan pushed his own bottle towards Xu Ping.

Xu Ping felt self-conscious. "No, thanks. One's enough."

"No worries." Huang Fan flashed a smile. "I don't have much here, but I never get low on beer."

He then slapped his own thigh and stood up. "Hang on a second."

Xu Ping assumed he was going to fetch the study materials, so he nodded. Then he sunk into the comfy couch cushion, feeling his body relax. The room was very quiet. Outside the window, the gentle sunset shone on the green trees, and a tree sparrow was hopping on the balcony pecking at its food. He turned to the table and flipped through the books on the coffee table. Turning over the cover of Quantum Physics, he found the dedication page: I dedicate this book to my dear wife, Kathleen, for thirty beautiful years of my life.

"I could lend it to you if you're interested."

Xu Ping turned around. "No, it's fine. I wouldn't understand it anyway. Just looking around."

Huang Fan put the stack of study materials down and took a seat beside Xu Ping. "You can skip the demonstration and proof. That part's too complicated, but the part about quantum cosmology is interesting, though. Have you heard of Schrödinger's cat?"

Xu Ping shook his head.

"Hypothetically speaking, you place a cat into a box with a poison-releasing contraption. In the box, there's also a radioactive atom, and this atom has a fifty percent chance of decaying within one hour, thereby activating the poison contraption and killing the cat. When you open the box after one hour, there will be two possibilities: one, an atom that has undergone decay and a dead cat, and two, an atom that hasn't undergone decay and a live cat."

"That's right," Xu Ping said after some quick thought.

"The question is, then, what is the cat's condition before you inspect it?"

According to quantum theory, the cat is neither dead nor alive before you open the box, but a state of overlap."

Xu Ping considered it for a while. "I don't really understand. What does a state of overlap mean?"

"It is indeed a little hard to grasp at first," Huang Fan chuckled. "Because quantum theory discusses the world from a micro perspective. When the mass and qualities of matter become very, very small, to the extent of the sub-atomic particles, the movement pattern becomes vastly different. But I like one explanation in particular. Let's say the box held not the cat but your fate. Before opening the box, you exist and you don't exist simultaneously. The moment the box is opened, the world splits into numerous worlds, and you exist in the space according to your choices. And there are many more you's living in parallel worlds because they chose differently."

Xu Ping processed this for a moment. "So according to what you said, I am here in your house, and there are many more me's, maybe lying on the road dying, or at home doing homework, or playing ball?"

"You could say that," Xu Ping smiled.

"I still don't really get it," Xu Ping admitted after more thought. "But it's an interesting way to look at things."

"Fascinating, isn't it? The ultimate stages of physics research turn into religion or something. Even a top scholar like Newton turned to God in his old age. But if you think about it another way, his life-long research was probably the will of God."

"Are you in the faculty of physics?"

"No, I'm in maths. We place more importance on the rigorous process of mathematical proof, not the philosophical meanings of the results. But a lot of things have happened lately, and these books made me think a lot."

Xu Ping asked in a soft voice, "How's the student movement now?"

"It's still going, but we face more and more challenges." Huang Fan paused. "The hunger strike did not bring about our desired results, so now we're holding meetings and discussing what to do next. Some student leaders brought up the

idea of self-immolation.”

Xu Ping was a little tipsy and took a few seconds before fully comprehending. “Self-immolation?”

“Yeah, they want to use their flesh and blood to awaken the people’s conscience.”

“No!” Xu Ping exclaimed after a long silence. “That’s not right!”

Huang Fan fell silent for a long time staring at the other man before nodding. “I don’t agree either, so I voted against it at the meeting. If they insist on the idea, I will take my people and leave.”

Xu Ping nodded. “It’s better to stay alive. No matter what, staying alive is better.”

“Yeah, if only they thought about it with a shred of rational sense, they would agree to that truth, but when you’re standing at the head of the crowd, and one word from you brings back the echo of hundreds, thousands of people, you start having this illusion of invincibility. It becomes hard to control yourself then.”

“Do you feel that, too?”

“I do. But I’m calmer than they are. Because I have more I’m after.”

Xu Ping looked up. “What?”

Huang Fan thought about it before answering. “If I had to say, it’d probably be freedom.”

Xu Ping scoffed. “Why, you don’t think you’re free?”

Huang Fan smiled. “Not that kind of freedom.”

Xu Ping didn’t hold back and kept laughing. “Then what kind of freedom?”

Huang Fan kept his gaze on the other man and enunciated, “The kind of freedom where I can walk alongside the person I love in broad day light without people pointing and whispering.”

ayszhang: Someone has translated this story into Thai based on my English translations! Click [here](#).

Next chapter is an intense one. Hold onto your seats!

[Twenty-four](#)

[Twenty-six](#)



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Chapter 26 of [Brother!](#)

NSFW

Twenty-six

Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.

—Oscar Wilde

Upon hearing this, Xu Ping froze before starting to shudder involuntarily.

The feeling of suffocation seemed to have come back again.

His head was spinning. Maybe it was the alcohol finally hitting him.

He put his hand on the stack of study materials and breathed, “Sorry, it’s

getting late. I'm going to go."

He made to take the books but was stopped by a hand.

"What're you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid."

"Is it me?"

"I'm not afraid of anybody."

Huang Fan laughed. "I thought you'd already guessed. Out of all the people I know from high school you're the only one who still calls me President Huang."

"...no, it's not what you think."

"Xu Ping." Huang Fan kept his eyes on him. "You and I are the same."

After a pause, Xu Ping repeated, "Sorry, I really have to go."

He hurriedly stood up, but Huang Fan grabbed him, making him fall back on the couch. The older man locked his hands above his head and hovered over him.

Xu Ping was so shocked and angry he was shaking.

"Let go!"

"Tell me who hit you."

"Nobody hit me."

Huang Fan stared at his face, scoffing. "Liar."

Xu Ping struggled against the other man. "I fell down the stairs!"

Huang Fan continued looking down at Xu Ping for a moment before touching his face. "It must hurt. Do you love him so much that you won't even resist when he beats you?"

Xu Ping shook his head furiously. "Go to hell! Let go of me!"

"No wonder you're so depressed. Does he know your feelings?"

"Shut up!"

"So he hasn't realized. And you're too scared to tell him, aren't you? Since

you're both men."

"Shut your mouth!"

"How much do you love him? Do you love him so much you touch yourself at night calling his name? So much that you shudder when you get close to him? So much that you wake up from a wet dream about him, your legs and pants covered with cum?"

Xu Ping kicked at Huang Fan but he only held the leg down.

"You lost so much weight partly because of the exam but also because you've realized you have fallen desperately in love, right? You want to run but you can't. You're in so much pain but have no one to turn to. How would they look at you if they knew? That the smart, proper student, Xu Ping, was a disgusting homosexual? You're too scared to tell your parents, too scared to tell your friends. You find yourself alone in this world with nowhere to go except here, because you know only I can understand your pain, only I can comfort your soul. How long did you wait for me outside? Two hours? Three? Or maybe four? Poor Xu Ping. You're so heartbroken, yet you put on an act as if you're all right. You're on the verge of breaking down yet you don't have the courage to tell anyone your secret."

Xu Ping clenched his teeth.

"You fear me, don't you? Because looking at me is like looking at yourself, dirty and disgusting. That's why sly little you always kept your distance no matter how I tried to get to know you. You keep running away whenever someone forces you to face the problem. You must be getting desperate to be coming to me on your own accord. You have no other way out, so you'd even drink a poison like me. Isn't that right?"

Then Huang Fan burst out in guffaws as though he thought of something funny.

While holding down Xu Ping, he began unbuttoning his own shirt at a leisurely pace. "I spent the entire day speaking with a bunch of idiots and crazies. I'm starting to doubt that these guys actually have brains, thinking they could conquer the world with a couple thousand students?! The direness of the situation is painfully obvious, but they still think the revolution is near its victory

and won't leave the square no matter what. Their hearts are empty and weak, not even knowing what they are chasing after. The crowd cheers, and they explode with bloody passion; they parade the flag of democracy while not even knowing what democracy is. Or they're just daydreamers who dare to have a vision but hold none of the abilities to make those visions come true. Once they run into trouble, I'm called onto the scene to wipe their asses. I've had it with these so-called team members!"

He took off his shirt, revealing the lean and powerful torso underneath. "Then, as if I hadn't had enough today, you show up. I spent the whole day dealing with those sons of bitches at the square and just wanted to come home, take a nice shower and relax. But no, you come to my door crying like a little bitch. I'm not the one you like, but you still come here looking for comfort after getting beat up, and like always you try to run away when we hit the crux of the issue. What the hell makes you think I'm a damn doormat for you to walk on whenever you want?!"

Then he stopped speaking and leaned down towards Xu Ping until his breath was warm against the younger man's face. For a split second, his eyes were gentle.

"That guy doesn't understand your pain at all, not one bit. It makes me furious to think that something I had liked for so long was treated so roughly by someone else."

He grabbed Xu Ping by the hair and forced a kiss.

Startled, Xu Ping fought back.

"Shit! You actually bit me!" Huang Fan wiped away the blood from his lips and sat up, leaving Xu Ping.

He sat on the couch by Xu Ping's feet and slipped out a box of cigarettes. He slid one out, lit it with a click of the lighter and breathed out a cloud of white smoke.

Xu Ping sat up panting wildly, face full of shock.

"All right, you leave now. I can't help you with your problem."

Xu Ping didn't reply.

"If you don't leave now, there are no guarantees I won't rape you."

Xu Ping sat there for a while, pondering, before saying, "I'm sorry."

Huang Fan paused with his cigarette and asked, "What? Is that pity?"

"No, not pity. I just think we're alike."

Huang Fan scoffed, "I'm not a candy-ass who can't say shit to the person I love!"

After some silence, Xu Ping nodded. "You're right. I'll probably never express my feelings for him because the one I love is none other than my blood brother, Xu Zheng."

With that said, he headed for the door without checking for Huang Fan's reaction. His darkest, most hideous secret of his eighteen years of life, the thorn imbedded in his flesh, had been exposed so casually.

Why would he love his brother? What hatred must destiny have harboured to curse him with this twisted and perverse romance? Xu Ping couldn't find the answers. Sometimes when he looked into the mirror, he even had the unbearable thought that he was not human, for underneath that average face was a frightening beast, lurking quietly.

His hand had just touched the doorknob when the man behind him grabbed his arm. Then he was spun around, and he struggled against the grip for a moment and only a moment.

Wiping the tears from Xu Ping's face, Huang Fan sighed. "You really won't let me off that easily, eh."

This time Xu Ping did not fight back when he was kissed. Perhaps it was because his shady secrets had been exposed to this man that he could feel this carefree.

"Have you done it before with anybody?" Huang Fan asked as he carried Xu Ping back to the couch.

Xu Ping shook his head.

Huang Fan smiled delightedly.

“Oh yeah?” he said. “Then let me be your brother, Xu Ping.”

The sky was completely dark now. Rain began falling, exploding with plops when it hit the glass.

The curtains in the living room were not drawn, but the clouds hid the moon, and the room was so dark nothing could be discerned.

Feeling chilly, Xu Ping had to fight hard not to shiver.

Huang Fan poured out half a glass of baijiu in the kitchen and brought it to Xu Ping. “Drink.”

Xu Ping thought it was water and took a big gulp. The stinging smell rushed up his nose and into his skull, and he began coughing.

“What is that?”

Huang Fan only chuckled.

He took a bit into his mouth and grabbed the back of Xu Ping’s head for another forceful kiss.

Xu Ping felt the liquor dripping down along his neck and then a flaming hot muscle stirring his mouth.

He had never experienced such a strange sensation, as if he were being violated from the inside. While his protests came out as muffled noises, his hands pushed the other man.

But they were quickly caught by Huang Fan, who put them behind his neck. “Hold onto me.”

Everything smelled like alcohol. His hair. His skin. Xu Ping felt as though his brain were fried by the smell, and his nose was about to break down.

His white shirt was ripped open, the buttons clinking after they sprang away.

He wanted to say no, but there was another tongue in his mouth blocking the way.

Every part of him was being touched. The other man was sucking his neck while roughly playing with his chest as he would that of a woman. He was met

with an unusual tingle that shot up his spine when his nipples were touched, and he couldn't hold back a yelp.

Taking notice of this, Huang Fan ducked down and began licking, flicking a nipple with his tongue.

Xu Ping clenched his teeth while his chest rose and fell violently.

His belt was undone. His pants were torn off.

The man's hand was on his penis which was only slightly engorged, not yet hard.

Huang Fan held the younger man in his arms, licking his ear while stroking his penis.

Eyes tightly shut, Xu Ping stayed soundless.

Fingers drew circles on the head of his member. Hands were wrapped around his penis, kneading. He was erect but his erection was soft and limp.

Huang Fan was licking his neck when he suddenly whispered in his ear, "Gege."

Xu Ping shuddered as though electricity ran through him. His member instantly filled with blood, hardening into a rod.

In the house where nothing could be discerned; even the scents were muddled by alcohol. The person behind him was tall and his embrace warm. He was calling him gege. He was licking his earlobe. Who is this? Who is this?

I love you, Gege.

Don't leave me, Gege.

I love Gege, but Gege doesn't love me.

We have to be together forever, Gege.

Gege. Gege.

Oh, it must be Xiao-Zheng.

So it's Xiao-Zheng.

His eyes closed, Xu Ping reached behind himself to cup his brother's face.

Don't be afraid, Xiao-Zheng, I will always protect you. Gege will never leave you.

His underwear was peeled off. His legs were spread open.

It was embarrassing to be facing the door with his legs splayed wide open, but as long as it was what his brother wanted, he was fine with it.

Even if his nipples were painfully twisted or his member roughly treated, he would still shake uncontrollably at even the lightest breath down his neck from his brother.

He rested his head back on the shoulder behind him and reached with both hands to hug his neck.

Feeling his brother's erection poking at his waist, he couldn't help but touch it, but he was stopped.

Then he was flipped over like a fish in a pan to land face down on the couch with his butt high in the air.

Both his hands were being held down while relentless kisses trailed down his spine.

His cheeks were spread apart. Xu Ping shuddered from the pain when one finger entered him. The foreign invasion made him struggle, as though his body knew, despite the amount of alcohol flowing through him, that he would fall victim to immense pain if he were not to fight back now.

"Gege."

Hearing the gentle beckon, he eventually stopped writhing.

The finger slid in and out of him. Soon, one became two.

It took Xu Ping a very long time before he realized why his brother had to play with that filthy place. He pressed his face against the couch and bore with it in silence.

It didn't feel good at all, but if it was what his brother wanted, it didn't matter if he was going to bleed or be broken.

The thought of his brother entering him made him shake with fear but also

want to cry from excitement.

There was a voice in his head constantly reminding him that something was wrong, but he purposely ignored it. He didn't want to think about anything just this once. Just once was good enough. Then he would abandon all these feelings to become a good son, a good brother.

He raised his head and urged the person behind him with closed eyes, "Hurry."

He heard a quiet laugh from behind.

Silently, he repeated his brother's name.

Xiao-Zheng. Xiao-Zheng. Xiao-Zheng.

He was ready.

Then – CLICK! – the lights came on in the living room as though it had woken up from its dream.

He heard a young man's slightly accented voice say as luggage was tossed onto the ground, "What the hell. You left the door unlocked..."

It was the roommate.

ayszhang: Keep in mind what happened in this chapter, as it comes back to bite us(?) in the butt.

On another note, I've settled back at home, the lovely Raincouver. School started for me, and while I have a light courseload, I will be working in my parents' office on the days I have off from school. Translation will be put aside for the most part, so I won't be updating as often as before, but like always the dates will be posted on the update schedule section. These dates indicate when the following chapter will be posted.

Also, I would like to warn readers against reading our work on other sites, as this is the only site where we post our novel translations.

[Twenty-five](#)



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Chapter 27 of [Brother!](#)
barely nsfw

Twenty-seven

No, I am not a child anymore; I have grown and matured through the adversity. But why do I yearn for the loving hands of my mom or any one of my family, or even of someone I know. Please come close to me in this lonely hour, please hold my hand tight and give to me love and power so I may overcome this arduous journey.

—Đặng Thùy Trâm, Last Night I Dreamed of Peace

Xu Ping's hands would not stop trembling.

Only the top two buttons remained intact on his shirt, but he couldn't even get those small, white plastic pieces in place.

The door to the bedroom opened and closed. Huang Fan walked over while slipping into a T-shirt.

"It's okay. My roommate is in his own room now. You had your face in the couch. He shouldn't have seen it."

Xu Ping merely continued his attempt at the buttons with shaking hands as though he had not heard.

Huang Fan lit a cigarette and took a few puffs before rummaging through his closet and tossing a sweater to Xu Ping. "That shirt of yours is no good. Use mine for now."

The white sweater fell on the younger man's lap but soon slipped onto the floor.

Watching this, Huang Fan stubbed out the smoke and approached Xu Ping. "I'll help you."

Before he even got close enough to touch Xu Ping, the latter hissed loudly, "Don't touch me!"

Huang Fan's hand stayed frozen in midair for some time before dropping to his side and forming a tight fist, but his face showed none of it. He chuckled, "Why are you so scared? I'm not in the mood anymore even if you want to do it now."

Xu Ping had finally conquered the first button and moved his shivering hands to the second one.

Huang Fan picked up the sweater from the ground, dusted it off and held it up before Xu Ping. "Wear this. The buttons on your shirt all broke off, and the fabric is thin. You're going to catch a cold in the rain."

Xu Ping kept his head down in silence.

Huang Fan slid his hands into the sweater from the bottom and stretched it out for Xu Ping. "Come on. Head first."

Xu Ping slapped the garment to the floor.

He glared at the other man with something akin to hatred before slowly moving his gaze away. "I was wrong. I should've never come here."

Huang Fan paused and then let his head fall back as he guffawed.

Then suddenly he grabbed Xu Ping by the collar and threw him against the wall. "Say that again, you motherfucker!"

Xu Ping looked up at him and enunciated clearly, "I should've never –"

But he didn't get to finish because Huang Fan grabbed his neck.

Xu Ping's neck was the most beautiful, most delicate part of his body. Sometimes Huang Fan could get lost just looking at a small tilt of Xu Ping's head.

When he was on the student council, he did all he could to keep Xu Ping close to him. He organized numerous events every single term, not to promote extracurricular activities for all the students, but to spend as much time as he could with this boy. Their classrooms were on different floors, but he would take the long route for no reason and would look in, searching for his figure seemingly unintentionally. Sometimes the boy would be reading, or chatting with classmates, or lying on his desk snoozing, showing off a section of his fair neck. A trivial scene like that could keep him reminiscing all day long.

He quickly let go.

Xu Ping slumped to the floor, coughing violently.

After a very long time, he finally caught his breath. He spoke, hand on his neck. "Are you trying to kill me?"

Huang Fan clenched his teeth.

Xu Ping picked up his pants and put them on.

The other buttons on his shirt had completely come loose from the earlier episode, and he couldn't cover himself fully even if he used both his hands to hold the shirt close.

"I'm sorry," Huang Fan said in an undertone.

Xu Ping announced softly, "I have to go home. It's late. My brother must be

worried sick.”

Huang Fan grabbed him. “Forget your brother. You and him have no future. What can he do for you? All he will do is drag you down! He doesn’t even have the ability to survive in this world; he’s just an idiot! It’s the same as you loving a dog! Be with me, Xu Ping! We share the same interests and passions. I love you, and I am capable of taking care of you. Being gay is still taboo, but you will be ten times less stressed than now!”

Xu Ping peeled his hand off and replied calmly, “Thank you, Huang Fan. But if it weren’t for Xu Zheng, I wouldn’t even be gay.”

That night, the rain didn’t stop until the wee hours of the morning.

Huang Fan parted the curtains and watched the downpour hit the street lit by dim yellow lights. Other than the rings of light, everything else was black. This gave him the illusion that the water was falling not from the sky but from the streetlights themselves.

Xu Ping had left.

He had seen Xu Ping off to the lobby. The rain was going strong, and the raindrops bounced so high off the ground that his pant legs were wet.

He passed his umbrella to Xu Ping, but the younger man did not take it.

“Take it! Look at this rain! Do you want a cold?”

With his hands holding his shirt together, Xu Ping replied flatly, “You don’t understand. I don’t want to borrow anything from you. Borrowing it means I’d have to return it, and then we would have to meet again. What’s the point?”

Huang Fan paused, his hand nearly cracking the shaft of the umbrella. He smiled, “Are you worried my roommate will blab about what happened today? Rest assured, I have my ways of shutting him up. You won’t be involved.”

He grabbed Xu Ping’s hand, flattened the palm, placed the umbrella in it, and manually wrapped his fingers around it.

“Hold onto it.”

The moment he let go, the black folding umbrella hit the ground with a clunk.

Huang Fan bent over, picked it up and placed it in Xu Ping's hand again.

And it fell to the ground again.

Huang Fan looked up at the ceiling for a few seconds before smiling again. "All right, you selfish boy. I don't want this back. It'll be a gift, okay?"

Solemnly, he placed the umbrella back in Xu Ping's hand and wrapped his hand around the younger man's hand, holding it in place.

He stayed like that for a long time, but when he slowly let go, the umbrella fell yet again.

He bent over to pick it up, but when he straightened his back, he threw it down in an explosion of fury.

"What the fuck do you want, Xu Ping?!"

Speechlessly, Xu Ping picked up the umbrella and placed it in the basket of a bicycle parked in the corridor.

"So you want to draw the lines after using me, and go separate ways from here on out?" He scoffed. "You wish!"

Xu Ping stuck a hand out into the rain, testing. "Whatever you want to think, I'm leaving."

Huang Fan lunged and grabbed his arm, chest heaving roughly as he managed his frustration. "Don't do this, Xu Ping. I had no idea he would come back all of a sudden. He told me he would spend the weekend at home. If he hadn't interrupted, you'd be mine now! Think about it from my side. This isn't my fault!"

Xu Ping faced away and didn't speak.

A sliver of hope blossomed in Huang Fan. He wrapped his arms tightly around Xu Ping. "If there's anything I can do, just tell me. My place is no good now, but if you want, there's a motel nearby. We can go there –"

Xu Ping shoved him away.

"You still don't understand, Huang Fan. I'm not angry with you. I'm not angry at all. I'm just disappointed – disappointed with myself. I did something very

wrong. I shouldn't have come here. The one I love is not you, and I don't want anything to happen between us. The one I love is Xu Zheng. I was only able to get it up by pretending you were him."

Huang Fan stayed quiet for a second before responding, "Yeah, I know. So what? Pretend I'm your brother, then."

Xu Ping looked down and was momentarily quiet in contemplation. "No."

Flinging the older man's hand away, he walked into the rain. Instantly, his clothes became soaked.

As Huang Fan watched the figure under the streetlights, a shout escaped his lips. "XU PING!"

Holding his shirt together, Xu Ping turned his head. His wet hair hung in lumpy strands down his forehead.

It was raining so hard that his eyes could barely stay open.

In that moment, there were so many things Huang Fan wished to tell Xu Ping. That he was likely on the blacklist already. That he was going to be imprisoned as a political criminal – five years, ten years, or twenty years – and he would have merely a fraction of his life left after the sentence. That he hoped to have a taste of joy for just one night with Xu Ping even if that meant he would be treated as a substitute.

But the words that came close to a plea were not uttered.

Xu Ping gave him a slight nod before quickly disappearing around a rainy street corner.

ayszhang: Early surprise for Chinese Moon Festival and Korean Thanksgiving :)

[Twenty-six](#)

[Twenty-eight](#)



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Chapter 28 of [Brother!](#)

NSFW

Twenty-eight

I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice; only I have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my house.

The livelong day has passed in spreading his seat on the floor; but the lamp has not been lit and I cannot ask him into my house.

I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is not yet.

—Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*

CRACK!

Silvery lightning arced across the night sky. Four or five seconds later, thunder boomed.

Xu Ping shivered like a leaf as he rummaged for the house keys, a small puddle forming by his feet.

The house was not illuminated by lights but by the television screen on which a dubbed black-and-white film, Waterloo Bridge, was playing.

"But you don't know me!" The woman argued anxiously.

"I'll discover you, spend the rest of my life doing it." The man held her gaze steadily.

"Xiao-Zheng?"

No answer came.

Xu Ping reached for the switch on the wall, but the lights in the living room did not turn on.

Right when he was pulling his hand back, somebody grabbed it, almost making him scream.

"Xiao-Zheng?!"

The other hand is big, dry and warm.

Xu Ping only grew easy as his eyes made out his brother's silhouette in the darkness.

"Why didn't you answer when I called you?"

Xu Zheng thought for a second. "The light bulb broke."

Xu Ping stayed silent for a while before taking his hand back. "Oh, really? Leave it. I'll change it later."

He didn't give an explanation for his late return home, and Xu Zheng didn't inquire either, as though he forgot.

The wall clock ticked on.

Xu Ping remarked quietly after shivering, "It's raining so hard outside."

"Yeah." A pause. "Your hand is wet."

A smile found its way to Xu Ping's lips. "Have you eaten yet?"

Xu Zheng shook his head.

"I'm going to take a shower and get changed. I'll make some rice vermicelli later."

Having gotten used to the dark living room, Xu Ping found the white incandescent light rather harsh. He squinted at the wall, its tiles a shade of oddly frightening white.

The latch on the door had been broken for a few weeks now and still had not been fixed.

He was soaked to his underwear. His sneakers squeaked with every step that he made like a sponge being squeezed. He took off his socks and found the skin on his toes all wrinkly.

With no buttons to hold his shirt together, he had to do the job with his hands on the way home as he hurried past all the pedestrians holding an umbrella, afraid to look up. He had not felt it in the midst of crazed indulgence, but the moment clarity came to him, the shame and guilt seemed to swallow him whole. There was money in his pocket, but he was too self-conscious to take the bus, so he walked all the way home.

His body heat completely washed away by the rainwater, Xu Ping was so cold his teeth were chattering.

Stripping off the clothes heavy with water, he stepped into the tub eagerly.

The moment the hot water splashed onto his skin, he felt a tingle followed by a burning sensation. It was as if his nerve endings were damaged to the point of confusing the sensation of hot and cold.

He closed his eyes as the water fell onto his head.

Only after he felt his body warming up again did he reach over to draw the curtain, but he stopped dead in his tracks.

Xu Zheng was standing in the bathroom eyeing him with a haunting stare.

Most likely due to the forceful handling, his chest and thighs were spotted with purplish fingerprints. The four-digit bruises on his butt cheeks were still very much present. His nipples were also red and swollen, appearing provocatively beautiful.

Xu Ping quickly pulled the curtain shut, barking, "Get out! Who told you to come in here?!"

The water splish-splashed away, but Xu Zheng did not answer.

Xu Ping took the shampoo container and hurled it outward. "Out!"

He heard the container clunk against the floor and bounce up to hit something else which led to even more clatter.

Then dead silence.

He sat in the tub hugging his legs, shivering.

Finally after ages, he lifted an edge of the curtain and looked out. His brother was long gone.

Water was bubbling noisily in the aluminum pot. He opened the lid, and white hot steam rushed at his face.

Xu Ping put in a handful of vermicelli and gave it a good stir. Then he made two omelettes.

And that was dinner.

Xu Ping placed a pair of chopsticks on the bowl before his brother. "Eat."

Xu Zheng slowly picked up the utensils but his eyes never left his older brother.

Xu Ping just kept his head down eating.

Not enough salt. Oh well. It was too much of a bother to get it.

The egg was overcooked. He took a bite and felt there were bits of egg yolk stuck to his teeth.

Waterloo Bridge was coming to an end. Myra jumped, falling under speeding wheels, and the score began to play.

"I loved you. I've never loved anyone else. I never shall. That's the truth, Roy. I never shall."

Xu Ping went over and turned off the television.

He accidentally knocked down his chopsticks when getting back to his seat. He bent down to pick them up.

On the way back from the kitchen, he grabbed the salt. He sprinkled a little and stirred the noodles with the chopsticks, but it still didn't taste like anything.

The hands on the wall clock pointed to nine-forty.

Unable to ignore it any longer, Xu Ping slapped his chopsticks onto the table and faced Xu Zheng with a glare. "What're you looking at?!"

Xu Zheng replied, face emotionless, "I look at Gege's neck."

Xu Ping faltered as his hand involuntarily went up to his neck.

"There are handprints on your neck."

Huang Fan had used a lot of force when he strangled him. Xu Ping didn't even notice it had left marks.

"Why are handprints there?" His younger brother asked lowly while holding his chopsticks in an awkward position.

He continued his questioning, slowly but surely, and kept eye contact with his brother. "Where did Gege go today? I waited for you. You said you would come back soon. Who were you with? Gege —"

SCREEEECH.

The chair scraped harshly against the floor.

Xu Ping sprung up, hands on the table, chest heaving. Only after some time did he gather his breath and hiss coldly, "None of your business!"

His brother was apparently angry.

Xu Ping was washing the dishes in the kitchen when he heard the bedroom door slam shut. Xu Ping froze for a second but continued his work as though nothing had happened.

After he stepped out of the kitchen, he found the lights off in his brother's bedroom. He turned the doorknob but found it locked from the inside.

Only then did a hint of despair appear on his lowered face.

One by one, he turned off the lights in the rest of the house, letting it return to the embrace of darkness.

Lying down under the sheets, he felt as if his body were a loose pile of mud.

It was dark and quiet. From the bed, the ceilings seemed higher than he had imagined.

Huang Fan had screamed his name in the rain but did not say a single word. Xu Ping thought it was because the man knew they would never meet again.

When Huang Fan's roommate barged in through the door, Xu Ping was startled and caught off guard. Huang Fan pressed his face down into the couch, and without skipping a beat, exchanged a few light words with his roommate the details of which Xu Ping had no memory. He couldn't even remember if the stranger had seen his face or not.

Intelligent and collected, Huang Fan never let any difficulty or challenge hinder him, but Xu Ping couldn't find it in himself to feel positive towards this man.

What frustrated Xu Ping more was the fact that his brother had seen the bruises on his body. He checked in the mirror earlier and saw that the thumb prints on his neck were slightly purple. His nipples were extremely swollen, and the other marks on his body left him feeling incredibly embarrassed. He quickly covered it with clothes, not daring to take a second glance.

He could have covered his tracks with lies, but for some reason he was in such shock looking at Xu Zheng's stern gaze that he couldn't get a peep out.

Since when did his brother learn how to question him?

Xu Ping rolled around in frustration.

Oh well. That boy wouldn't understand anyway. If he asked again, he would simply say he was in a fight.

As he decided this, he let his eyes droop shut.

Perhaps because of his exhaustion, he fell into a deep slumber very quickly. He dreamt he was running for his life along the rails in a long, dark tunnel. The headlights of the train were flashing like the eyes of a wolf, trailing behind him, getting closer and closer, until the train crushed him under its wheels. He shot up in pain, shouting, only to find his naked brother lying on him.

He was dumbfounded for three seconds, and then he demanded angrily, "What are you doing here?!" as he tried to push his brother off. "Get off of me!"

Xu Zheng looked down at him, not moving an inch.

Xu Ping was a little disturbed by his expression and gave another push. "Get off!"

"No!"

Xu Ping froze.

"What did you say?!"

Xu Zheng suddenly pulled on his shirt, and the two began wrestling on the bed.

The tank top was ripped very quickly, and Xu Zheng threw it down to the ground in a furious fit.

Unable to stand this, Xu Ping slapped his brother across the face.

Xu Zheng's face flew to the side and stayed there for some time.

When he eventually turned back around, there was an expression of fury and rebellion.

He grabbed his older brother's wrist and twisted roughly.

Xu Ping yelped in pain.

His underwear was pulled off, and the quilt fell to the floor.

Scared and shocked, Xu Ping put all his effort into kicking at his brother, but the teenager caught his legs with his own.

His limbs were all secured to the bed. Xu Ping was like a fish on a chopping board, doing his best to flop his way off, only to be pinned back down by Xu

Zheng.

His brother pressed down like a boulder.

“Don’t do this, Xiao-Zheng. Don’t...” Xu Ping pleaded with despair as he continued to struggle.

Meanwhile, his brother had become erect from the wrestling. The burning erection poked at his abdomen through a pair of underpants, and the more he struggled the harder it became.

Soon his energy was drained, and his efforts to break free grew weak.

His brother held him down in a position like a wrestler’s hold. With their fingers and legs interlocked, his feeble attempts were no longer resistance but rather the lustful teases between lovers.

Xu Zheng was breathing down his neck. Skin to skin. The air was filled with the boy’s scent.

“No, we can’t do this...” But even as he said so, to his own dismay he became hard. His rationality told him to resist, but his body wanted nothing but to indulge. Xu Ping felt as though he were walking on a tightrope high in the air. His soul itself was just about to split in half.

Xu Zheng splayed one hand on his chest and began touching his nipples roughly.

“There are fingerprints here.” The boy said.

Xu Ping shook as he clenched his teeth.

His brother did not leave his lower half untouched and began kneading his crotch.

“There are here too.”

The veins on Xu Ping’s neck were about to pop.

“Gege was touched.” He accused angrily. “Here. Here. And here!”

As he spoke, he touched Xu Ping all over as though to vent his anger.

Finally, Xu Ping could no longer keep silent. “Yes! I was touched! And so what?! I wanted to be touched! It has nothing to do with you! Let go of me!”

Xu Zheng stayed frozen for quite some time until sadness, anger and disbelief all appeared on his face at once. He tightened his grip on Xu Ping's wrist, almost making Xu Ping whimper in pain.

"NO!" He bellowed. "NO! NO! NO!"

"GEGE IS MINE! MINE! ONLY MINE!"

With desperate tears in his eyes, Xu Ping shook his head.

"GEGE IS MINE!" Xu Zheng repeated each word with frightening emotion on his face.

"No, Xiao-Zheng. That's not true."

Xu Zheng stared at him for what seemed like hours. Then he raised his head to the sky and screamed like a madman.

Xu Ping shut his eyes tightly.

Xu Zheng dipped his head down again and bit his brother's collarbone so hard that blood quickly trickled out of the corner of his lips.

Xu Ping yelped painfully.

He pulled at Xu Zheng's hair, but the teenager would not let go no matter what.

Xu Ping let his head fall back and bore with the pain, his hands creating ugly wrinkles in the bed sheets.

Amidst such pain, he could somehow feel a twisted sense of happiness. It was as if the unspeakable love that he harboured for his brother, a sin of unforgivable immorality, could only be expressed in this warped and painful way.

Letting out a shout of his own, Xu Ping held his brother's head and kissed the boy with everything he had.

The two became tangled in their embrace, their tongues never separating for even a moment.

The taste of rust became an aphrodisiac for Xu Ping, driving him to shake with excitement.

The two of them rolled from one end of the bed to the other. Xu Zheng held his brother so tightly, as if he wanted to embed him into his own body.

Xu Ping felt like he was falling off the tightrope. His penis rubbed against his brother. His hand rushed to touch every inch of his brother's back. He wanted to say to the boy, "Tighter. Tighter. I want you to crush me to pieces before you let me go." But his tongue was busy battling with that of his brother.

Shutting his eyes, he guided the boy's hands to explore his own body, and the two continued into the madness.

He didn't want to think. He wanted only to fall, to keep falling, faster and faster. He could not see his surroundings and lost awareness of the ground and the sky. Just as time got lost amidst the tunes of the merry-go-around, he wanted to forget it all and let it all come to an end when he hit the ground.

He heard a small exclamation from his brother. Splutters of white fluid landed on his abdomen.

Everything came to a grinding stop. The tightrope-walking clown opened his eyes and found one of his feet not on the rope. The show was still going on. The fall was nothing but a fuzzy daydream.

He shoved his brother away and fell off the bed.

Xu Zheng was sprawled on the bed, panting wildly. He had just experienced his first ever ejaculation.

His semen had fallen on Xu Ping's abdomen in a few sticky puddles.

Xu Ping ran his hand through them and found the fluid thick and gamy, forming silvery strands between his fingers like a spider's silk.

He stared unbelievably at his own hand. Slowly, he slumped to the floor and, with his hands tearing at his hair, began crying.

ayszhang: Sorry for being late! Have been busier than a bee.

[Twenty-seven](#)



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29

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, Kai, Lee, m@o, Marcia



Chapter 29 of [Brother](#)!

Twenty-nine

All is fate

All is smoke All is a beginning without end All is a search that dies at birth

—Bei Dao, All

“Senior high, third year division three, Ms. Li Xiuyun, senior high, third year division three, Ms. Li Xiuyun, please report to the infirmary immediately.”

When this announcement played on the screechy public address system, Xu Ping was lying, eyes shut, on the white cot in the infirmary.

“What in the world happened?”

“He got hit by a basketball.”

“No way? A basketball? Look at these bruises on his face!”

“It wasn’t me. His face was bruised when he came to school on Monday. I only hit the back of his head!”

“For goodness’ sake, the guy fainted. Don’t act so innocent!”

“There’s always bumps and scuffles in basketball. It wasn’t on purpose. Who knew he’d be that weak. I even asked him when I hit him, and he said he was fine. Then he took two steps and toppled over. I had to haul him all the way here.”

“Hey, hey. Out of the way. Out of the way. The nurse is here.”

“[Sir](#), is he okay?”

“...nothing too serious. It’s probably because of stress and a lack of sleep. See these bags under his eyes? Oh, right. You are third year students, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir. You have to take a closer look and tell me he is okay for sure. He’s the top of our class. The school’s looking at him to make Tsinghua or Peking. If anything affects his exam results, our homeroom teacher is going to kill me.”

“Don’t worry. It’s just over-exhaustion. A good diet and some sleep will do him good. He’s young; he’ll recover in no time.”

“That’s good. You hear that, Liu Wen? It wasn’t my fault.”

“Consider yourself lucky this time, you idiot.”

“Shut the fuck up! Quit jinxing me, you little shit!”

“Hey, if you don’t have any business here, get out, all of you. Don’t create more problems in the infirmary. The patient needs to rest.”

“Goodbye, sir.”

White walls. White curtains. White quilt. White ceiling.

Xu Ping opened his eyes just a crack before closing them.

Tired. Don't want to move.

The air smelled like iodine tincture. There was someone humming what seemed to be Hou Dejian's Descendants of the Dragon.

The door burst open.

"Mr. Chen, I came as soon as I heard the PA. Is Xu Ping all right?"

It was Ms. Li, the homeroom teacher.

"He's fine. He fainted after being hit by a basketball during PE class. He's lying back there."

Xu Ping heard curtains being drawn. The two staff members stood by his cot to observe his condition.

"He's asleep. Maybe he's too tired." The nurse lowered his voice low. "Let's leave him to rest."

"What happened? How could he be that reckless during PE?"

"The main issue isn't PE. He doesn't look well. He has very dark bags under his eyes. It looks like he hasn't gotten much sleep for quite some time."

Ms. Lee sighed.

"Here's my two cents: It could be the stress of the examination. With these emotional issues, it'd be best if his teachers and parents provided some counselling. Otherwise, it'll be hard for him to perform well."

"I'll speak with him when he wakes."

"I took care of the injuries on his face, too. Was he in a fight? He has all these bruises."

Ms. Lee sighed again, replying, "I also asked him about it a few days ago, but he insisted he fell down the stairs. See, this kid has a complicated background. His mother passed away many years ago, and his father's frequently away from home for work. It's just him and his younger brother at home. And his brother, well, he has some problems up here. He's a retard."

"You're kidding."

"It's true. He's very close with his brother. Initially, he didn't even want to put

down any schools outside the province because he wanted to go to a school here. I had to give him a stern talk in my office to make him consider otherwise. So, okay, he came in this Monday with his application filled out, but his face was covered with bruises. I asked if his brother beat him because the boy didn't want him to go to Beijing, but he assured me that wasn't the case. But let's be honest here. I'm an old lady, and I've seen enough in my days. If you ask me, it was definitely his brother. A retard wouldn't know boundaries. A retard only knows to vent his anger. And that's why Xu Ping's like this."

"Poor child."

"I know. I've seen his brother once. A scary giant of a boy. All muscle. He looks like a monster of sorts. And his retard brain is the worse problem. He might not remember you even if you gave him the nicest treatment. He usually looks nice and quiet, but you say one wrong word, and he goes crazy, hitting people – the works. Nobody can hold him down. If you ask me, someone like that in your family must have been sent by karma to repay the debt you owe from the previous life. What suffering that must be!"

"I had no idea."

"I know. What a poor kid..."

Xu Ping's lashes fluttered a few times before he slowly rolled over and fell asleep.

"We must follow the Three Rules of Discipline, and we must not forget the Eight Points for Attention. One, be polite when speaking. Respect the crowds, and do not act prideful..."

One by one, trucks loaded with soldiers drove past on the road. White banners stretched across the body of the trucks reading, "PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY IS FOR THE PEOPLE." The squad leaders led their soldiers in singing The Three Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points for Attention, their voices booming far and wide.

The passengers on the No. 18 bus all strained their necks to look. One was counting with [her](#) fingers, "One, two, three, four..."

“Why are so many soldiers heading into town?” Xu Ping heard another passenger complaining quietly.

The man sitting a row ahead of Xu Ping was shaking out a copy of People’s Daily to read. Xu Ping poked his head out and caught a glimpse of the headlines: “The Necessity of Identifying the Nature of the Unrest and Enforcing Strict Punishment.” June 3rd, 1989. Xinhua News Agency.

Xu Ping frowned.

The vehicle jounced over a pothole, and the rough shake prompted him to grab the handle on the seat in front of him.

The brother grabbed his arm, but Xu Ping shook it off almost as soon as he did.

He turned towards the window to avoid seeing his brother’s reaction.

The sun was about to set, dyeing the entire river a gentle amber. To the left of the water was the newly built part of town with its lively, tall buildings. To the right were a few run-down factories with their giant red brick chimneys shooting for the sky.

It seemed that almost every day for the past few years there had been new things being born and old ones dying out. The city kept changing its face – road construction, tear-downs, new houses – slowly becoming a totally different entity. The new buildings were indeed tall and beautiful, but for some reason it saddened him to see the old buildings which housed his childhood memories being torn down.

Xu Ping carefully eased the window down a little. A gust of river air tousled his hair.

“Gege.”

Xu Ping feigned ignorance.

“Gege.”

Xu Ping heard but was too annoyed to bother.

Xu Zheng placed a hand on his brother’s lap but was roughly pushed away.

The bus came to a sudden stop, the momentum flinging all of its passengers forward.

The driver turned to everybody. "The road ahead is blocked off. I can't get through."

The passengers opened the windows sticking their heads out only to see the familiar road blocked off with road blocks and metal mesh. The shops were all closed, and there were armed police giving directions for cars and diverting the crowd.

"Does this mean we're going under martial law?" Someone wondered quietly.

The wind blew the newspaper out of the man's hands. Xu Ping bent over and picked it up.

Underneath the extra bold font on the front page was a smaller line:

"We must fight the unrest with a clear-cut stand."

The paper flapped noisily in the wind. Xu Ping folded the pages and held the corners down before reading.

On the way home from the bus stop, neither of them spoke.

The clouds in the sky had turned a million shades of purple with the ones by the west horizon tinted in brilliant red hues. The brisk wind made his pants legs flap.

His dad had called the previous night asking about the situation at home. After hearing about Xu Ping's university choices, he stayed silent for a while before expressing happy relief and encouragement.

When it came time for Xu Zheng to speak, the boy only held the receiver and stared straight at his older brother.

Xu Ping could guess what his dad said. It didn't stray far from warning his brother not to disturb his study because he was aiming for a good university out of town and asking him to learn to be independent because his older brother would not always be there.

His brother held the phone without saying a word.

That night, Xu Ping locked himself in his room studying while listening to smashing and shattering coming from the living room. When he opened the door, he was welcomed by a huge mess.

Since that night of confused emotions, Xu Ping had been avoiding Xu Zheng constantly. Unless it was necessary, he didn't want to say anything to him. As the dishes crashed and shattered on to the floor, Xu Ping clenched his fist and forced himself, stroke after stroke, to write the mock exam. In the end, he hit his head against the desk out of pure despair.

Just a while longer. Just a bit...

On that night of hopeless tears, he made up his mind to sever this twisted love. Perhaps his sense of love had become so muddled because he had stayed with his brother for far too long. If he could attend university somewhere far away, everything should return to normal after four years, shouldn't it?

SCREEEECH!

Xu Ping was suddenly stopped by his brother's hug from behind.

The window of a grey sedan was rolled down, and a middle-aged driver popped out his head, roaring, "What the hell, you blind or what?! It's red! You wanna die?!"

In a stupor, Xu Ping took a few seconds to respond. "Sorry about that. I wasn't paying attention."

"You need some help walking, boy?! How fucking old are you?! Even an elementary kid knows how to cross the damn street!"

"Sorry."

The driver rolled up the window, cursing and spitting, before speeding off.

Xu Ping brushed his brother's arms away. Xu Zheng wrapped them around him again. Xu Ping brushed them away again.

The light flashed green and the people began pushing forward, but quite a few cyclists were turning to look at these two.

Xu Ping hurried after the crowd and left his brother behind.

Xu Zheng faltered and stayed standing in the spot.

The light went from green to yellow, then yellow to red.

Xu Zheng looked up and saw his brother standing on the other side of the road. He had only lifted his foot when Xu Ping screamed at the top of his lungs, "Don't move!"

Startled, Xu Zheng stayed in the silly position with one leg up.

Cars drove past one after another. The light went from red to green.

Xu Ping dashed across the intersection, grabbed his brother and stomped off.

The two of them walked like that for a great distance, the younger behind the elder, until their complex came into view. Then Xu Ping shoved his brother on the chest, scolding, "Who told you to save me?! Why are you trying to save me?! You can't even cross the road yourself! You know nothing! Why don't you learn to protect yourself first?!"

Xu Zheng stumbled back a few steps, hand on his chest, dumbly watching his brother, and eventually hung his head low.

ayszhang: I'm getting the hang of squeezing in a few hours of translation in the midst of studying and working. Look forward to more steady releases :)

Also Happy Thanksgiving!

[Twenty-eight](#)

[Thirty](#)



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30

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, Kai, Lee, m@o, Marcia



Chapter 30 of [Brother!](#)

Thirty

All joy lacks smiles

All sorrow lacks tears

All language is repetition

All contact is a first encounter

—Bei Dao, All

“Urgent announcement from the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: the army, local police force and armed police force have liberty to enforce martial law

through any means necessary. Protest organizers and rioters are solely responsible for all consequences..."

Xu Ping stood in front of the television, reading the rolling notice in silence.

His brother was not in the living room. Xu Zheng had shut himself in his room for the whole evening, ignoring even knocks on his door.

The clock ticked until eleven-thirty on that night of unrest and insomnia.

Brrrrrring-brrrrrring! The phone began ringing.

"Hello?" Xu Ping picked up.

No response came for some time.

"Hello? Is that you, Dad?"

Nothing.

"Helloooo?"

Fucking pranksters! He was just about to hang up when he heard a feeble voice.

"Xu Ping."

"Huang Fan?"

Xu Ping pressed the receiver back against his ear and tried for a long time to find something to say.

He heard a series of cracks and bangs from the other end like fireworks or firecrackers. "Where are you?"

The man did not reply.

"The martial law notice has been playing on TV this whole time. Are you still at the square?" He cupped a hand around the receiver and pressed his voice low. "They say it's very dangerous out there. Don't hang around any longer. Hurry home!"

All he heard was heavy breathing from the other end.

"What's that over there? Why are you guys playing with firecrackers now of all times?!"

Huang Fan started chuckling softly for a while. "Yeah, we just wanted to have some fun while we still could. We'll be done soon."

Xu Ping didn't reply. Something in Huang Fan's voice made him very uneasy, but he could not figure it out in the moment.

"How are you, Xu Ping?"

"I'm all right."

"...not going to ask about me?"

After a pause, Xu Ping asked, "How are you, Huang Fan?"

"I'm good."

It was such a normal conversation, yet Xu Ping felt the tiny hairs on his body bristling.

"Xu Ping."

"Yeah?"

But the man didn't say anything for a very long time.

"What the hell is going on, Huang Fan?"

Huang Fan laughed. "Nothing, just wanted to call you for some reason."

"Call me, now out of all times?! Do you not know the city is under martial law?!"

Huang Fan stayed quiet for some time before asking abruptly, "I always wanted to ask you if you had any dreams you wanted to make come true."

Xu Ping faltered. "No, I don't. I'm not a very ambitious person. I just want to live a normal life with my family."

"You have nothing you really, really want?"

"I do. I want my brother to become normal, but that doesn't seem very feasible, so I don't think about it much."

"That's great." Huang paused. "Growing up, I thought I was like a rat living in the gutters. The other kids were all nice and clean while I was the only one who was dirty and stinky. Nothing could rid me of the smells I had. So the biggest

dream I had was to be able to not lie in the gutters one day, but sadly this hasn't come true yet."

"Why are you telling me this? Where in the world are you, Huang Fan?"

"Xu Ping, if you didn't have your brother, would you want to be with me?"

Xu Ping considered for a moment and answered slowly, "I don't know."

Huang Fan started laughing again, but laughter turned into coughing.

"I really envy Xu Zheng. He might be an idiot, but he has someone like you loving him wholeheartedly."

Xu Ping clenched his fist. "Stop talking."

Huang Fan chuckled. "What are you afraid of? You know, Xu Ping, your biggest fault is being hesitant and fearful, always keeping yourself in a tight frame, unable to relax for even a second. Let me guess. Did you put down Beijing schools on your application?"

Xu Ping clenched his teeth.

"You want to force yourself to be apart from your brother, thinking that would sever your feelings for him." He began laughing and coughing simultaneously. "Xu Ping, you truly are the biggest fool I've ever seen. What's the point living like this?"

"Did you call just to make fun of me?" Xu Ping spit coldly.

Huang Fan continued without paying heed. "If I were you, Xu Ping, and I met someone I liked, I wouldn't give a damn about what anybody says. I'd hold onto him with everything I got and never let go."

"He's my brother!" Xu Ping snapped.

"So what? Does he like you?"

Xu Ping didn't speak.

After a spell of violent coughing, Huang Fan continued quietly, "Really, Xu Ping, I really envy your brother."

"What's there to envy? He's just an idiot."

"Yeah, that's why I envy him. He has obtained what I want without lifting a single finger, but he doesn't have the slightest clue as to its value."

Xu Ping chose to stay quiet.

As he listened to the man's heavy breathing, a firecracker seemed to explode near him on the other end. BOOM!

Xu Ping shuddered.

"Huang Fan! Are you really playing with firecrackers?! Where are you?! The People's Square?!" He shouted into the receiver.

Huang Fan laughed. "Yeah, we're at the square with firecrackers. The ertijiao is pretty loud. Why, did it scare you?"

Xu Ping couldn't speak through his clenched jaws.

"You're too much of a scaredy-cat, Xu Ping. You need to let yourself go. Sometimes you have to let go first to get what you want. But," he coughed through his laughter, "it's not good to be too reckless, like me."

"Huang Fan, you're wounded, aren't you?"

Silence on the other end, then weak chuckles. "Amazing. You could tell over the phone. I was caught off guard by the firecracker and fell down some steps and bumped my head. Don't worry, though, it's just a light scratch. It'll go away tomorrow morning."

Xu Ping covered his eyes trying to push back the tears.

"Oh no, Xu Ping, we can't talk anymore. I borrowed a Brick from a friend from Hong Kong, and the minutes are very expensive, and the battery is about to die. Say goodbye to me, Xu Ping."

"Huang Fan, you fucking bastard! Why the hell did you call me?! You don't want me to rest easy, do you?!"

After a long pause, a quiet response came. "I'm sorry, Xu Ping. I'm a selfish person. If I could, I really want to see you again. I miss you. I'm sorry."

Doo-doo-doo. The tone began to play.

"Hello?! Hello?!" Xu Ping yelled into the receiver, but the connection had been

terminated.

He smashed the receiver back onto the phone.

The martial law announcement kept rolling across the television screen.

“Urgent announcement from the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: the army, local police force and armed police force have liberty to enforce martial law through any means necessary. Protest organizers and rioters are solely responsible for all consequences...”

Biting his nails frantically, Xu Ping paced the room a few times before dashing to his bedroom for a jacket.

He knocked loudly on his brother’s door. “Xiao-Zheng, I’m heading out for a bit.”

His brother didn’t answer.

When he was getting out his sneakers from the closet, his brother finally came out from his room.

“Where are you going, Gege?”

After slipping on his shoes and grabbing his keys, Xu Ping turned around. “I’m going out for a bit. Be back very soon. You stay here. Don’t go anywhere.”

Wearing a tank top and shorts, Xu Zheng shot forward and grabbed him. “I go, too.”

Xu Ping eyed him and then gave him a powerful shove, warning sternly, “You stay home, and don’t go anywhere!”

Xu Zheng heard the front door locking from the outside. After a moment of stupor, he leaned out the balcony and saw his brother racing out the building wearing a grey jacket and blue jeans.

Leaning on the railing, he hollered, “GEGE!”

Xu Ping didn’t hear. His running was swift and nimble, like a soaring bird, flashing once under the streetlight before disappearing into the vast darkness.

[Video](#) of ertijiao being set off.

[Militia at Tiananmen Square](#) in 1989

ayszhang: As you probably noticed, I specifically choose to translate stories that showcase cultural, historical and social aspects of China. This is another period of pain and sorrow in recent Chinese history, and as people living outside of PRC we are privileged with the task of remembering this event and not allowing it to fade away in time. I'd like to thank the author for being so brave and portraying this event so faithfully.

[Twenty-nine](#)

[Thirty-one](#)



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31

Translator: ayszhang

Editor: Marcia



Chapter 31 of [Brother!](#)

Thirty-one

All love is in the heart

All past is in a dream

—Bei Dao, All

One streetlight, and then another.

There was someone singing quietly somewhere in the night.

“In the ancient Orient is a dragon. Its name is the Middle Kingdom; In the ancient Orient is a tribe. They are all descendants of the dragon...”

The stars in the sky were blazing away from thousands of light years away in space. After a hundred thousand years, two hundred thousand years, what was left by the time their light reached this tiny, infamous planet was but a lifeless spark. Compared to the stars, the life of humans was as short as the life of a flower. A life could end in the blink of an eye. However, even the seemingly eternal constellations cooled and died after burning all of their energy and would eventually become space dust, defeated by the laws of time.

Xu Ping gasped for air as he leaned on a power line pole.

The pole was covered with ads and flyers of all colours. Beside the ad for psoriasis was a white notice with the word 'democracy' in huge font. Someone had torn off half of it, leaving the other half flapping in the night wind.

The People's Square was just a right turn away. He could faintly hear the commotion from here.

The main road leading to the square was brightly lit. Military vehicles drove past one by one.

Xu Ping felt a burning anxiety, but his legs would not step forward as though they were lead-laden.

A quick rest. Just a quick rest, he thought.

He heard footsteps approach him from behind – slappity slap slap – and stop somewhere behind him.

"Gege."

Still holding the pole, Xu Ping looked up in surprise. "Xiao-Zheng?! How did you get out?"

His brother was still wearing a tank top, shorts and a pair of blue plastic slippers from home. It seemed like he had fallen along the way, as his top and knees were grey with dirt.

"So? How did you get out?! I locked the door!"

His brother hung his head low. "I climbed down from the balcony."

His vision suddenly seemed to flicker in and out, and he couldn't see very well for some time. He asked quietly, trying to ignore the discomfort, "How did you

climb down from the balcony?"

"...along the pipe."

There was indeed a pipe for the drainage of the rooftop nailed to the wall right next to the balcony and leading straight down to the gutter on the ground.

Furious and upset, Xu Ping kicked his brother. "Are you insane?! Do you know how much you weigh?! What if the pipe broke and you fell from up there?!"

The more he thought about it, the angrier he became, and soon he was using his fists as well.

His brother stood there and didn't budge while taking the beating.

Xu Ping leaned on the pole, panting for a while before recovering.

"You go home." He fished out his keys from his pocket. "Take the keys and go in through the door."

"What about you, Gege?"

"I still have something to do, can't go with you."

"...I'll go with you."

Xu Ping barked, "What do you want with me?!"

Xu Zheng gazed at him dumbly.

Xu Ping gave him a shove. "Go home!"

His brother stepped back.

Xu Ping shoved him again. The boy backed up again.

"I'm telling you to go home. Are you deaf?!" Xu Ping snapped.

Xu Zheng straightened himself and diverted his gaze sideways to the road. "I'm not going home."

"What did you say?! You say that again!"

Xu Zheng didn't speak.

Xu Ping grabbed him by the tank top and shoved him back, but this time Xu

Zheng flung him aside.

“I won’t go home!” The boy roared. “I know! You want me to wait at home and you go see that bad person! I don’t want to go home! You’re mine, Gege! Only mine!”

Xu Ping was pushed to the ground and stayed there for some time before staggering to his feet and dusting himself off.

He thrust his keys in Xu Zheng’s hand and held the boy’s shoulders as he instructed, “You listen to me now, Xu Zheng. You go home straight away. If I find you taking one step after me, I will disown you as my brother!”

He shoved Xu Zheng on the back, making the boy stumble forward. Xu Zheng turned to look at his brother to find a cold, hard frown.

“Gege.”

“GO HOME!”

After standing there with his head down, Xu Zheng eventually started walking. Every few steps or so, he would take a look back at his brother. His gege’s shadow under the streetlight seemed very drawn-out.

Only when Xu Zheng disappeared around the corner did Xu Ping hurry along towards the square.

When Xu Ping recalled this night many, many years later, he would feel as though it was all a dream. Everything seemed hazy. He thought he remembered but when he thought about it carefully, the faces and the words in the depth of his memory all seemed to dissipate like fog.

Of course, the Xu Ping many, many years later was an extremely different person from the current Xu Ping. Years of life trained him to endure and be wary. He began to believe in the evil of man, that humans could commit heinous crimes without any self-restraint. He began to doubt the sincerity of others’ words and didn’t display any joy even from being praised. He became a person not so different from the thousands of others in this society. Cold and cautious, he wrapped his precious things deeper and deeper in his heart, never said

anything he shouldn't have said, and didn't do what he shouldn't have done. It's not to say that this Xu Ping was bad. It's just that he had paid a heavy price to become an adult.

Each one of us loses the naivety in our heart as we grow up, some earlier than others. Some are like lemons being grated for their zest, slowly being ground into the shape of an adult's by the forces of life. Others are like porcelain shattering on the floor into a gazillion pieces. They have to crawl back up and try their best to piece themselves back together, and in this process it's not unusual to lose a piece here or gain a piece there. By the end of it all, each will have become a brand new person.

Our protagonist, Xu Ping, was now only eighteen years old, thirty three days away from the nation-wide postsecondary entrance examination. He was presently racing through the city street in the dark of night.

Weewoooo...

The sirens blared as the ambulance sped past him.

It was nearing midnight, but people still lingered on the street.

This street was brightly lit while the surrounding city was dim. The closest light source was an old, gloomy streetlight in an alley some way off. Its light only formed a tiny circle before the dark swallowed it. This gave Xu Ping a strange, illusory feeling as though he were not walking on a street but standing on a grand stage.

He passed by many people all of whose expressions were stranded between joy and sorrow as though they were marionettes. Their mouths were open in the midst of speech, but Xu Ping couldn't make out what they were saying.

He was tired from running, gasping for air, but he couldn't stop.

The ground was littered with shards of broken glass. The horizon appeared to burn in an unnatural red.

He watched as frightened people ran towards him, brushed past him and sprinted in the opposite direction as him.

He slowed his pace and plowed his way through the crowd.

There were fences and road blocks several hundred metres from the square, leaving only one section cleared for entry and exit. Beside it were a handful of police vehicles and numerous armed police on patrol.

Xu Ping walked towards the entrance.

“Oi, oi! What’re you doing?!” Someone in green uniform barred his way.

“I’m going in.”

The man eyed him. “You can’t go in here!”

“My friend is in there!”

The man scoffed. “You can’t even if your parents are in here.”

Xu Ping stared at the man.

“What’re you looking at?! Are you deaf? You heard what I said?!”

“My friend is hurt. I have to save him!”

“I don’t care who your friend is. We have orders, and no means no! Get out of here!”

“He’s going to die!” Xu Ping shrieked.

The man paused, momentarily stunned, before barking angrily, “Are you fucking stupid?! I said get out of here!”

Xu Ping glared at him for a second and then bolted for the entrance.

The man stopped him and threw him to the ground.

“You wanna die, punk?!”

Xu Ping pushed himself off the ground and lunged for the entrance again, but he was kicked in the stomach and fell with a flop.

He lay on the ground coughing, unable to stand up for some time.

He heard hurried footsteps behind him before he fell into someone’s arms.

“Gege!”

He saw his brother’s fists. They were clenched so hard the veins on his

forearms were popping out.

He clutched the boy's arms.

The commotion had attracted the attention of a few more police officers who were now converging on them.

Their leader stomped towards Xu Zheng, shouting. "What're you doing?!"

Xu Zheng's eye went wide and his brows scrunched up tightly.

Wobbling, Xu Ping rushed to his feet to come between the two and pushed his brother back. "It's nothing to do with him. He doesn't know anything. He came looking for me."

Xu Zheng maintained his intense glare.

The officer squinted, apparently disgruntled. "What the fuck are you staring at?!"

Only long after a colleague of his slapped him on the back did the undignified policeman avert his eyes.

"How many times have I told you now, no means no! But you still tried to enter by force. You were asking for it!"

He forcefully swept Xu Ping aside. "Out of the way! Go off over there!"

Xu Ping tumbled to the ground with a thump.

Time seemed to slow down as Xu Zheng watched his brother slowly fall to the ground and remain there motionless for a long time. He looked at the policeman leisurely chatting with the person next to him without a care in the world. His pupils enlarged in a split second, and he approached, picking up speed as he neared his target. The man caught sight of him in his peripheral vision and made as if to shout a question when Xu Zheng pounced, knocking him to the ground. The boy held him down and struck a punch with his right hand. Each punch was stronger than the next, and every one met flesh, drawing out blood in a matter of seconds.

The scene escalated very quickly. After an initial stupor, the handful of police officers rushed to restrain Xu Zheng, some grabbing his arms, other his legs, while the boy fought and struggled. Having had enough time to recover, the

wounded policeman joined back in for a counterattack.

Xu Ping jumped in wanting to drag out his brother. He hugged the boy's waist, shouting, "Xiao-Zheng, stop it! Stop it now!"

"You motherfuckers," someone roared. "Get in here and help now!"

A baton connected with Xu Ping's back, and he flopped to the ground.

The world before his eyes seemed to crack. All around him were flickering shadows and angry shouts.

He kept rolling around trying to dodge the flying arms and legs. He couldn't see anything, but he knew the pain.

Time stopped working, too.

The last scene. He saw his brother holding him, shielding him underneath himself.

He heard the baton land on his brother's back like a low, muffled drumbeat.

ayszhang: Dun dun dun...!!! Hold on tight, guys. We're in for a tough ride.

Just to clarify, last week's release was replaced by a surprise chapter of CoER. Apologies to those who were waiting for Brother <3

[Thirty](#)

Thirty-two



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